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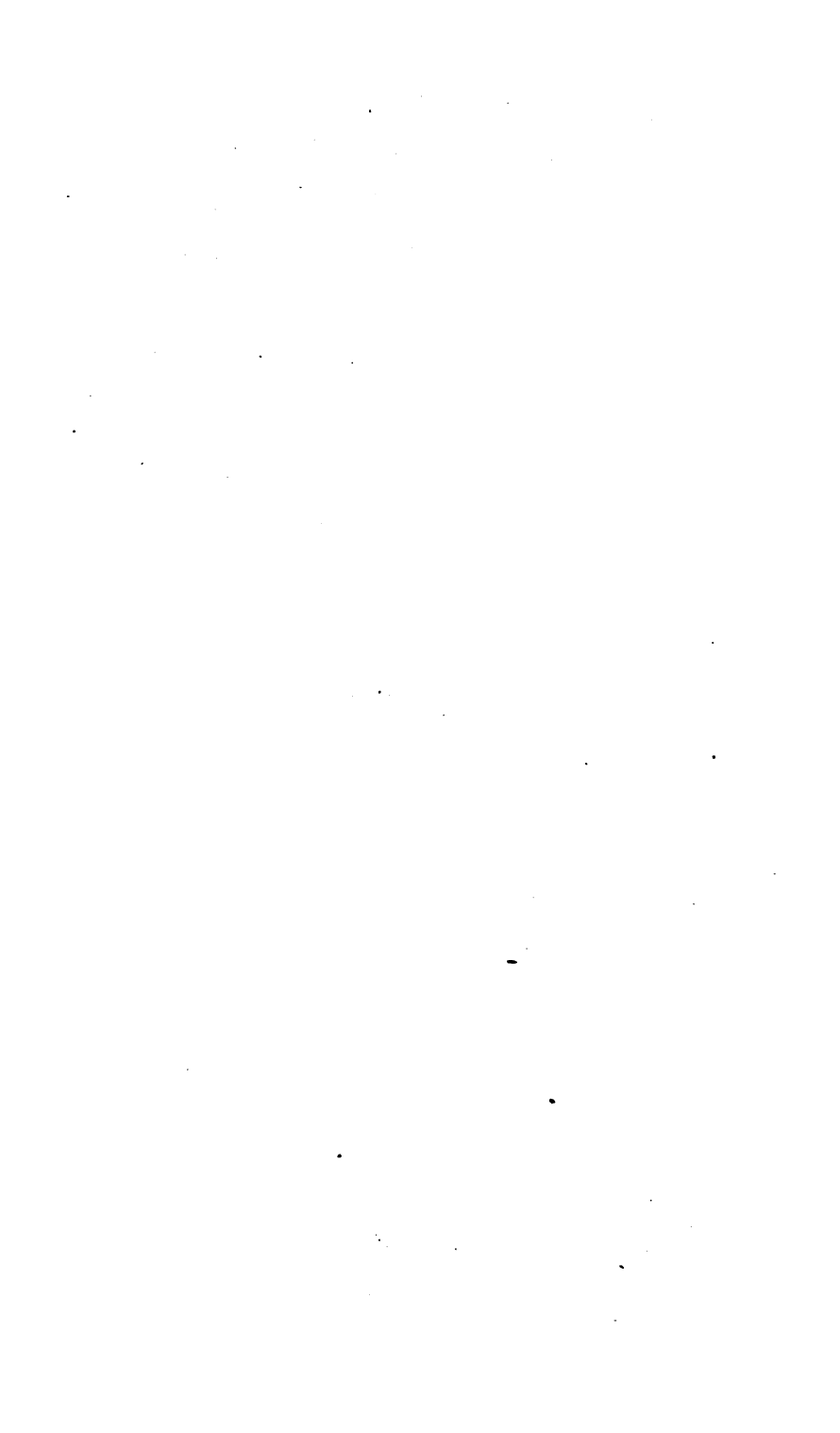


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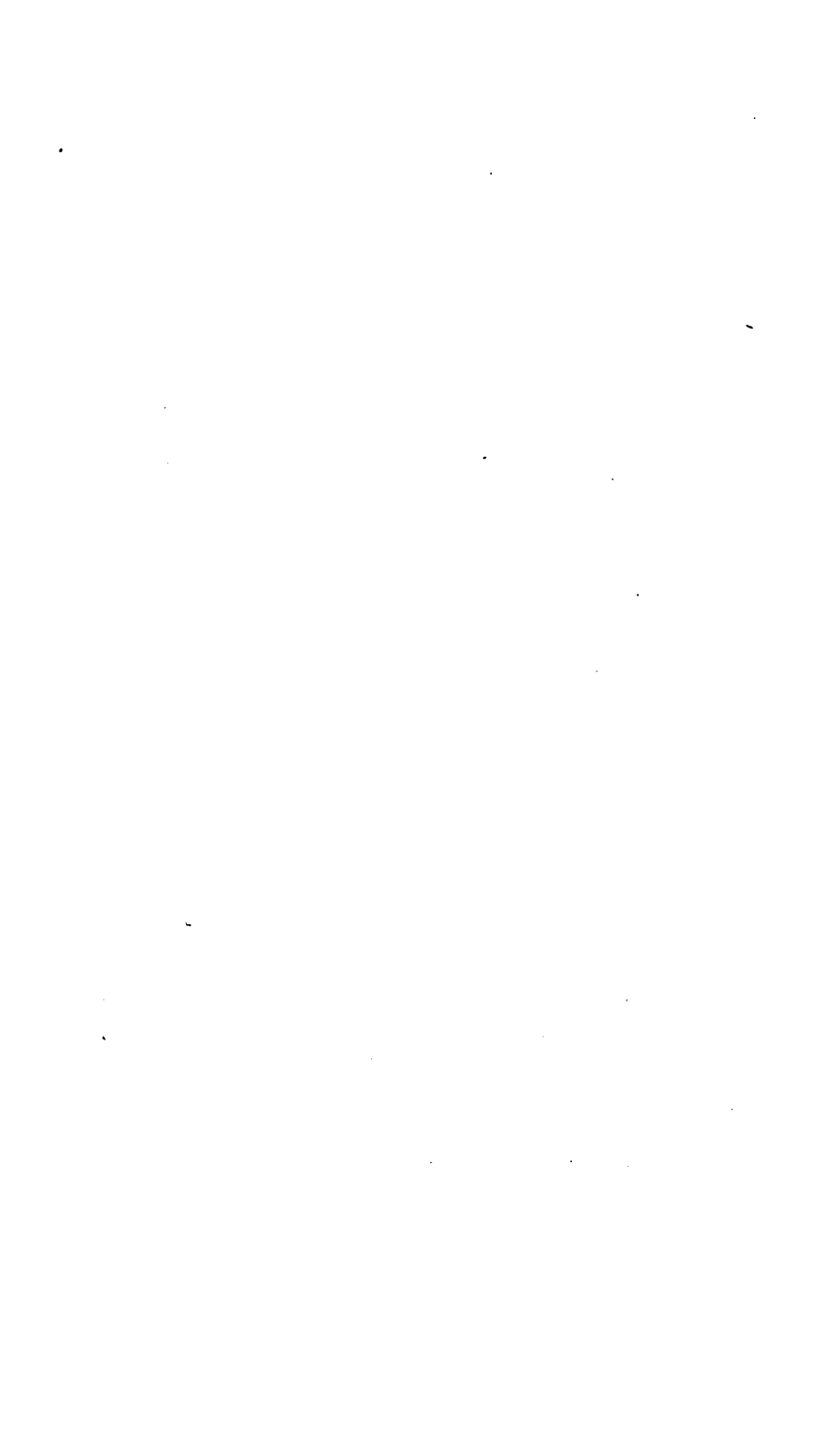
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**JOHN THOMPSON, BLOCKHEAD.**



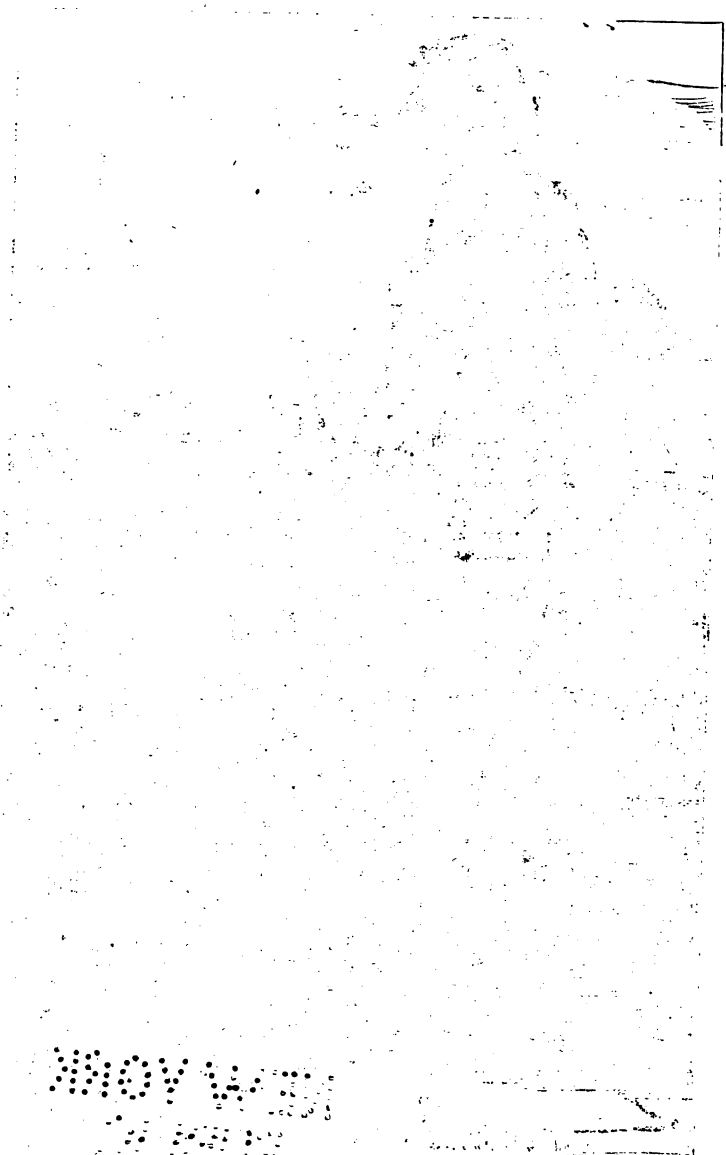
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# JOHN THOMPSON. BLOCKHEAD

And Companion Portraits

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BY LOUISA PARR

AUTHOR OF 'DOROTHY FOX'

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## JOHN THOMPSON, BLOCKHEAD.

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### I.



HAVE known men who could write after their names M.D., K.C.B., F.R.S., M.A., or B.A. Now, I can lay claim to none of these honourable distinctions; but certainly I never write my name, John Thompson, without feeling that I should, in justice to society, add A.B. What! you cannot guess what A.B. means? Oh! I forget you haven't seen me, talked to me, or to any of my relations, or you'd know at once. Well, then, A.B. means 'A block-head.' I'm a blockhead; my father says so, my sisters and brothers say so, my friends say so, all Axleford says so, and Sally Noggs says so. *Now* I need say no more, for when Sally Noggs knows a thing is so, the matter is settled, she being one

of those extraordinary women who not only know a thing is so when she has once been made acquainted with the fact, but, dear bless me! she knew it from the beginning. Though you are surprised that you don't remember it, she always told you it would be so.

My mother had one redeeming point in my father's eyes; she had a cousin, and this cousin was Miss Sally Noggs. I have often asked myself what age Miss Sally might be, and as yet I have not the faintest idea. I rather encourage the notion that she sprang into being, Minerva-like, fully equipped in her iron-grey alpaca dress, her hair doubtful and dressed in bands, and her spectacles pushed well up on her forehead. It was commonly said in our family that Sally Noggs had the eye of a hawk—terrible bird! I never met a hawk's eye; but, oh! to have Miss Sally's eye fixed upon you and running down your backbone, you wouldn't forget it for some time, I can assure you.

From my very birth I lay under the dislike of Sally Noggs. She had made it known to all whom it might concern that the next Miss Thompson was to be Sarah Thompson, and that my father need not bother his head about that child, as she, Miss Noggs, to put the matter figuratively,

was bending over it ready to pop a silver spoon into its mouth filled with investments, bonds, mortgages, and railway debentures. But, instead of lucky Sarah Thompson, unlucky I was ushered into the world, and although Miss Sally said she always knew it would be a boy, she never forgave me. In vain my father offered to brand me with the name of Noggs. Miss Sally would not be appeased; she considered that it was out of pure obstinacy I came into the world a member of the sterner sex; and she only answered with a sneer, 'Better call the little blockhead John.' So John I was called, and for this I certainly have a grateful feeling to Miss Sally. Only fancy having to sign one's name Noggs Thompson. The only thing is, that such a pre-nomen might have prevented me signing it at all, in which case I should certainly have been much better off.

The Thompsons of Burrige Hill were known through Axleford as a sharp family, —drivers of hard bargains, people who saw at a glance whether a scheme would succeed or not. If any project was set going in the town, nothing could say more for it than that Joshua and Samuel Thompson had a hand in it. Tell them of a failure, and their hard hands dived further down into their capacious pockets,

while they chuckled to think it had turned out as they had prophesied. These two men were my uncle and father. Uncle Josh was the eldest. There was another brother, William; but he, like me, was the youngest, and had come too late into the world, the rest of the family having exhausted all the sharpness before his turn came. So Uncle William tried to struggle through life, getting nothing from his well-to-do brothers but their pity—a pity which began, and ended, in speaking of him as ‘poor Bill, he was always the fool of the family.’

I think the reason my father had for marrying my mother was that he might become connected with Sally Noggs. She was a woman after his own heart,—‘shrewd, not to be taken in, and up to a bargain;’ while my poor mother was just the reverse, a timid little woman with a nervous manner, and a kindly heart. She had no comfort in her children after their babyhood. They soon began to take after their father, even to the extent of covertly despising her little weaknesses.

When I was born, there were already two Master Thompsons and two Miss Thompsons, the youngest of whom was several years older than myself. My advent was regarded by the family as being

'out of due season,' until I was prospectively appropriated by Miss Noggs. Then I was regarded as her property wholly and entirely, so that when I had the effrontery to be a boy instead of a girl, I really belonged to nobody, or to as good as nobody. Only my poor dear mother rejoiced inwardly that I was to be hers solely for a few years to come. Being a weakly child, I was not sent to school until I was seven years old. Once there it was soon discovered that I was a blockhead, for if I was the fortunate possessor of some valuable taw or alley, one of my companions most surely cajoled it from me by some tempting promise, or show of unwonted affection; and when I attempted to bring up the matter at another time, or remind him of his obligations, I was laughed at for a simpleton, or a blockhead—epithets echoed by my brothers and sisters at home when I bewailed my childish misery and disappointment. Only my dear mother tried to heal my wounded feelings, by telling me that she was sure that my school hero of the day 'did not mean what he said—that it was only fun perhaps, notwithstanding the misadventure.' Dear mother! sweet comforter! true consoler! she discovered my weak point even at that early age. I never grieved after what I

had given, what I had lost; my grief was for what I did not possess. *My* tears flowed to see the shattered idol which could not be set up again; *my* heart ached for the love, the confidence, the trust, which I thought I had gained, but which turned out a sham.

Of course my mother taught me to consider my father as the very type of excellence and wisdom. I can recollect, when a boy scarce past my childhood, how he used often to surprise and puzzle me. My two brothers, Nicholas and Samuel, by some trick or sharp manœuvre, would outwit a comrade in a way that seemed to my young mind unfair, unkind, and dishonourable, and would make the blood rush to my face with shame for them. But instead of the sharp rebuke I thought they would most surely get, my father only rubbed his hands and winked his eyes approvingly to Uncle Josh, or any neighbour near, as he chuckled, 'Chips of the old block, you see.' Could that mean that they were blockheads too? If so, the epithet would make me wince more than ever.

Uncle Josh was a widower with one son, on whom he set all his hopes and his pride. And well he might, for Dick was a fine, handsome fellow, and had all the good



looks of the family; he was four or five years older than me, and was my *beau ideal* of everything that was brave and noble. I would toil after him all day, carrying his fishing-tackle, or running here and there to fetch and carry messages, and I was amply rewarded by his calling me 'a jolly little chap, and I should come again.' He and my brothers cordially hated each other. He called them 'snobs' and they called him 'my lord' and 'a swell,' and sneered at his accounts of school fights, and notions of honour. But this was all to no purpose as far as I was concerned, for though in the fights he always came off victorious (which was only what I considered right and proper), and the stories all redounded to his own generosity and good feeling—who else possessed so much?—nothing he ever told made me feel ashamed of his motives, or caused any one to say that 'he was a chip of the old block.'

Dick was not a school-fellow of my brothers. He went to the grammar-school of the county town, and Uncle Josh gave him plenty of money to spend, that he might not be behind the member's sons and the sons of the county magnates who held different political opinions from Uncle Josh and the Thompsons, and thereby

incurred their particular 'envy, hatred, and malice.' Miss Noggs did not approve of Dick being brought up to hold his head so high, and prophesied that no good would come of it, begging us all to mark her words, that Uncle Josh was 'pickling a sharp rod for his own back,'—an idea which seemed rather pleasant to my father, as the same notion had entered his mind.

As time rolled on my feelings met with many rough blows from disappointments in my young friends. And there was one particular instance. At the age of thirteen I had centred all my interests on a sweet rosy-faced Gertrude, with long fair ringlets, whom I was often fortunate enough to secure as my partner at the dancing academy which we both attended. To her I devoted myself for months, hoarding up my pocket-money to purchase a magnificent valentine, and coaxing small dainties from my mother every Thursday to take as an offering to my little fairy, whose graceful movements and soft, pretty ways,—so different from anything I had ever seen in my sisters,—charmed me and filled me with affection for her. So it went on until one day, alas! I overheard her brother, whom I despised for his meanness and selfishness to her, coveting a ball I possessed. To my grief Gertrude replied,

'I'll get it from him ; one can get anything out of him if one tells him one is very fond of him.' 'The stupid !' exclaimed her brother. And my little friend laughingly agreed with him that I was a great stupid.

I wanted a great deal of comfort from my dear mother that day. But now, I could not go where I should see Gertrude, with such altered eyes ; so I endured my punishments for staying away from the dancing lessons for a few weeks ; and the holidays being fortunately near, we met no more.

Our home had been greatly altered since I first remembered it. My father no longer went to business every morning. My mother was entirely confined to the house, and often to her room. My two sisters had made excellent marriages, at least so the family thought. They told you what a capital income Julia's husband was making, and the sum Sophia's husband had settled upon her. They didn't tell you (for what signified it ?) that one man was an uneducated boor, and the other older than his wife's father. Then Nicholas, my eldest brother, had been taken into the business, and by his acuteness was turning all he touched into money. Sam had entered a house in

Liverpool, and was bent on one day becoming the head of the firm. I alone was left at home, and found myself eighteen years of age and not settled as to any occupation in life. My desire was to be a country clergyman, with my parish in a remote district, 'far from the busy haunts of men,' where I could indulge my love of natural history and live such a life as produced my favourite book — White's 'History of Selborne.' I was crushed at once by my father, who wondered what sort of a sermon such a blockhead could deliver. He was not very urgent in pressing for my decision, as while the question remained an open one I was employed as a clerk in the business. By this means, Nicholas remarked, they 'killed two birds with one stone:' they kept me out of mischief, and saved a salary. I am sure I worked hard enough; for Nick, who was very fond of his own pleasure and ease, would say constantly, 'Come, Jack, just do this for me, like a good fellow; I am so behindhand, that if you don't help me I shall get into a precious row.' Then after I had toiled up one column of crooked figures and down another till long after business hours, and went to see how Nick was getting on, I found that he had been gone a long while, having slipped off

quietly. When I told him of it, he would laugh his sly laugh, and say, 'Never mind, you're such a good-natured fellow, Jack.' I never seemed to get justice. If, when I had been over-imposed on, I complained to my uncle or my father, the person who had played off the trick, or invented the lie, was listened to with complaisance, as a shrewd fellow who was quite right to impose on any one who would believe him.

My cousin Dick had gone to college much against the real wish of my uncle, but Stapleton, the county member's son, had gone, as well as Sir Stamford Thornton's sons. So Dick had only to say they hadn't scrupled to tell fellows he knew, that their fathers had hinted that none of the Thompsons would ever possess spirit or money enough to send a son to Oxford. That was enough: no argument could have been so powerful, and we all felt that when Dick started on his college life, 'the Blues' would stagger under the blow they would receive.

About the time I attained my twenty-first year two important events occurred in my life. The first was, that an opening was offered to me in the house of Dalton Brothers, brokers and shipping agents. I was to be a clerk and learn the

business, with a rising salary; and at the end of five years I was to become a junior partner on payment of a certain sum. Now, a very considerate maiden aunt had left to each of her prosperous brother's children the sum of £2000, to be paid when they severally attained the age of twenty-five. This sum would thus come in for the required partnership. I accepted the situation gladly, though I greatly disliked living in London. But I knew Mr Edward Dalton, and felt that he was a man I could look up to; and whenever he had been to our house he had always shown me special kindness, and had not made me feel my inferiority to the rest of the family, which most of our friends, I must say, did.

The other important event was the death of my uncle William. The letter which announced this event spoke of the small sum his widow would have to bring up her family upon, and expressed a hope of receiving some assistance from his brothers. After considerable discussion it was agreed to send for Alice, the eldest daughter. She could attend upon my mother and look after the servants. Such a person had been wanted for some time, and Alice would not expect a salary. So it was considered that we had done as much as could be expected when a £10

note was forwarded from my father and uncle to defray the funeral expenses, and when we deprived the poor mother of the only one of her family who could comfort or be of use to her. Ah! Alice, when I pretended that some business took me at that very hour to the station, because I felt you would be lonely with no one to welcome you, or to look after you except the flyman, who was charged to inquire in the waiting-room if there was anybody of the name of Miss Alice Thompson for Burridge Hill—little did I then think I should there see the crowning joy and sorrow of my life. Child! how I love to picture you then, to draw upon my memory to reproduce your every look, each word you said, each trivial thing you did!

I suppose the old adage, 'Pity is akin to love,' is true, for before I saw you I pitied you, and when I met the soft brown eyes, the pale delicate face, and graceful figure clothed in mourning, did I love you then? I know not—I know not when pity died, and love was born, so mixed were those twin tender feelings; you had them then, in all their purity and strength, and through all these years they have been kept fresh for you. Alice, my friend, my counsellor, my trust, once my love, my joy, my own sweet-heart.

From the moment Alice entered the house my mother and I saw that she belonged to us, and possessed no more of the family sharpness than we did. It was fortunate for her that my sisters were married, and that she saw little of my father or Nicholas. Sally Noggs delivered her opinion of her as 'a poor thing with nothing to trade upon, neither good sense nor good looks.'

I had four clear months before I left for London—time enough for Alice so to grow into my life, that I never made a plan which was not submitted to her, never had a hope which she did not share. What cared I that my father laughed his loudest as he thanked his stars that he should soon be rid of the blockhead who was only fitted to dangle by a woman's apron-string, or that Nicholas sneered at and derided my attachment? Let them laugh, let them sneer at me, and not at her; for then a something rose within me and said, that though they were all I held dear in the world, they should repent and unsay their words. Now for the first time in my life I rejoiced that we were not a more united family; for I could sit in my mother's room, and for fear of disturbing her light sleep, whisper with Alice by the firelight, hearing of her dear ones at home, and tell-



ing her in return histories of my friends and school heroes, particularly of cousin Dick, whom she had never seen, and somehow fancied she should not like. Not like Dick! my ideal of manliness, courage, and honour. Why, I must not let her rest until she saw him with my eyes. So I never wearied talking of his good looks, winning ways, merry laugh, and tender heart, and was disappointed that gentle Alice would only shake her head, and say she did not care to meet him.

All too soon came the day of my departure for London, a sad day, and yet a day longed for, as bringing nearer the end of my probation; for Alice had promised to be my wife, and to wait five long years for me. Long years I call them, yet how short they seemed to look forward to then, compared to what they would appear now! Every year of our lifetime passes with more rapid strides.

Nobody but my mother was to be told of our engagement, and she had learnt to love Alice so dearly, and her life was so precarious, that we had no secrets from her. I had therefore to bid adieu one wintry morning to my old life, to Axleford, to Alice, and to enter upon my London life shrinkingly, distrustfully—as I always did enter on anything new. I

think I always got on better out of the sight and presence of my family, and I had no reason to complain of my reception. The house I had entered was an old-fashioned one, and the boys grew men, and the men grew grey in the same service. Two years passed away without much change. In that time I had been home twice. Now it *was* going home, for home to me meant my mother and Alice, and Axléford contained both my treasures. The loneliness I felt in London drew me close to the hearts to whom I was everything, and whose constant thought and care was of and for me. When weary of myself, as most of us become who sit evening after evening alone, I had but to shut my book and my eyes, and begin to wonder—generally with a sigh—what Alice was doing; and in a few minutes my dull room vanished, or was turned into our old country house; and I saw Alice as I had so often watched her, working at the little table by my mother's easy-chair, asking her to eat some little delicacy she had prepared. Then all would change again. Summer came, and with Alice on my arm, we wandered across my favourite fields down to the river-side, where, tuning my voice to its soft murmur, I told her again the same old story, which, when said by

me, she said seemed every time more new and sweet to her.

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II.

My third year was drawing to its close when I received a letter from Alice, telling me that cousin Dick had come home from abroad, where he had gone as soon as his legacy came into his possession. I had been rather surprised at his going, for he had often told me that he should need nearly the whole of the money to pay certain college debts he had not told his father of. Alice said little about him except that he was very kind to my mother, never seeming to weary reading and talking to her, and that he often spoke of me in terms of great affection. Dear old Dick, how grateful I felt to him! I wrote and told him so, and because we must have no secrets from him, confided our engagement to him, asking him to look after my dear Alice, to take her for a walk when he could, and for my sake to love her as a sister. Dick, in his letters to me, did not take any notice of what I had said, but I attributed this to his delicacy, as he had

evidently mentioned the circumstance to Alice, who wrote and said that she was so glad I had told him, because she wanted him to know it. Ah! then they were getting friends at last,—nobody could long withstand Dick, and she felt now as I always did, that he must share in all our joys. Alas! soon he had to share in our sorrow. A summons came for me to hurry down with all speed. My dear mother's end drew near, and a few days after I reached home Alice was all I had left me in this world. I felt anxious for her; I knew how dearly she had loved my kind gentle mother. Yet sometimes when we sat together, she almost turned away from my efforts to soothe her. Then an outburst of grief would come that seemed like self-reproach. Poor child, the quiet life she led unfitted her to bear any sudden shock; and I was quite grateful when Sally Noggs suggested that she needed a change, and that if my father didn't want to have her ill upon his hands, he had better let her have one. Sally, in spite of her sharp remark on Alice, always showed more kindness to her than to anybody else. This made me very attentive to Miss Sally in offering to see her home, and to carry her pattens or her dark lantern,—attentions which she did not decline with as

much energy now as when I was a boy. At that time the very mention of an escort raised a storm. No, she thanked goodness she had no fear of man or beast, and wanted nobody traipsing after her heels. So, equipped in a long camelot cloak of green plaid, and ornamented round the neck with the fur of some extinct animal, a shawl tied over her bonnet, and her tall figure raised up several inches by high pattens, Miss Sally would go forth alone a veritable Guy Fawkes. It has even been said that several highly imaginative persons did not recover their self-possession for weeks after suddenly coming upon her in the long narrow lane which led from our house to hers. First there was the peculiar clack-clack of the pattens, then the tall gaunt figure, and last of all the lantern, which she shaded by the folds of her cloak, until she was close upon you, when it was suddenly flashed in your face. The nerves of many a weak-hearted pedestrian thus got upset.

I do not know that I ever found Miss Sally more cheerful and agreeable than she was about this time. It was settled that Alice should go and pay her mother a visit. During her absence my father's house was to be kept by Miss Sally, who declared that 'nothing could have fitted in

better,' for she had been waiting a whole year to have her own house painted. The spring was the very time to have it done; and now she should be out of the smell, and yet have her eye on those good-for-nothing painters, who, if they got a chance, would always slight a job. But no opportunity for slighting did Miss Sally ever give. When the same event had occurred seven years before, I could remember seeing her mounted on a ladder, pointing out some discrepancies with her umbrella in the neighbourhood of the first-floor windows, at the same time upbraiding the assembled workmen below for their idleness, dishonesty, and want of attention. So Miss Sally forgave my mother for many of her weaknesses in consideration that she departed this life at such an appropriate time. She even spoke of her in accents nearly approaching to tenderness.

I took Alice down to Sandown, where her mother tried to increase her small income by letting her house in the season; and there I left her, hoping that when I came again I should find my darling looking bright and happy. A few days after my departure came a letter. Who should be there but Dick! He, too, had been out of sorts, and thought a sea-breeze

might set him up. So, as Mr Dalton said that I was wrong to return so soon, and as I still looked pale and wan, I ventured to ask him for a week's holiday. The following evening found me running along the sands seeking Dick and Alice, who, my aunt said, had been out all the afternoon. Was it the start that Alice gave, the crimson flush that slowly sunk to her more than usual paleness when I found them, or Dick's confusion as he stammered out his surprise at seeing me—that seemed to be stirring up troubled waters? I know not; but I was ashamed of myself afterwards when I felt glad that Dick said he was going the next morning. Before I came in to breakfast he had gone, leaving a message only for me. My aunt was evidently surprised at his sudden departure. She had understood, she said, that he had come for a week or two. Alice looked confused, and got up and went out of the room to fetch something; for did she not, like me, know that it was Dick's delicate forethought which made him go? He knew we should like to spend our time together, and feared that he should be an intruder. Alice said afterwards that she was glad he was gone, but not exactly in the tone in which I wanted her to say it. But then, she was not herself; she was restless

and uneasy. When we were out, she wanted to be at home; directly she was at home, she longed to be walking again. I could not understand her; she was sometimes more sharp to me than I had ever known her before, and sometimes, again, more loving and gentle. The peace of our love seemed broken.

Next day, to my surprise, Dick came back, without giving any reason for his being so undecided in his movements. He was gloomy and silent, and Alice so distant and cold to him, that I could not understand them. But that evening, as Alice had a headache, I left earlier than usual; only, however, to take a walk, and then go back and ask my aunt's consent to our having some advice for Alice. As I passed the hedge that surrounded their little garden, the truth came upon me; for there stood Dick, his handsome face pale and clouded, saying to—to my Alice, that if she could send him away, he ought to be able to go; but then he cried out, 'Oh, Alice! only let me tell him all. He is such a good fellow; if he knew how we loved each other——.' I heard no more. I saw it all. How could it be otherwise? I hope I did not blame her. Who could resist winning, handsome Dick? How could any girl care for a stupid fellow like me, when

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such a man as Dick said he loved her? I shall not dwell on that time nor stir up its misery. Alice, you never knew what it cost me to give you up. I loved you too well to wound your gentle heart, and I know how you both mourned that you should have saddened my life. But when I wrote and told you that I was falling into bachelor ways, and that I would soon be the crusty old bachelor-uncle proper for all young people to have attached to their establishment, did you think I was forgetting my grief? You did not know how dull my life was when hope seemed dead, how long were the days that slowly passed with no letter to cheer their gloom; and then the dreary evening, lonely and alone indeed now,—no pictures, no memories, no spirit companions.

Uncle Josh's great wish was, that Dick should marry well, and among the county people. So, to spare his father the trouble of refusing, he never asked his consent, but married Alice quietly one morning, informing the old gentleman of what he had done by letter, and expressing his regret at not being able to fall in with his father's views at all times. In order to show his sincerity, he added that he was now willing to enter into the business—a thing he had before violently opposed, and flatly refused to do.

My father pretended to be exceedingly wroth with Alice; but inasmuch as he gloried in anything that prevented Dick holding his head so high, and chuckled with Sally Noggs over what they had seen from the first was certain to happen, I don't think he lost much of his favour. One thing he took care to do. This was, to strengthen Uncle Josh's resolution that Dick should not now be admitted as a partner. Nicholas and he left nothing unturned to ensure this result, and poor Dick's offer to become a British merchant was declined with thanks. His allowance of £300 a year was continued to him. He had had £300 a year from the time he went to college, and, in addition to this, Uncle Josh always paid his bills. A grand warfare raged between father and son for days, sometimes weeks, at these settling periods; but in the end Dick carried the day, and the bills were paid. Uncle Josh's decision did not therefore greatly affect him. He did as he had done before, spent his income, and got into debt for everything he wanted, while Alice fretted, and saved, and pinched, until she looked, at the end of the year, more pale and delicate than ever.

One evening after leaving the office I

returned to my lodgings, where, to my surprise, I found Dick. He was so cast down and haggard that I could hardly believe my eyes. He told me his wretched story. I could not take it in, so garbled and wandering it seemed. He had become mixed up with a cavalry regiment stationed near our county town. The officers played high, and he had gone from bad to worse until he had forged his father's name. The bill would be due immediately, and discovered to be false. His father had not answered or taken any notice of his letters asking for money. What was to be done? He was in despair. Oh, Dick, Dick, my hero Dick! how bitter it was to see you so fallen, to know they could scorn you now, and no honest man defend you! And Alice? Yes, Alice was there. She knew it all. Her heart would break. Never, while I could stay it, I inly resolved. Had I not for years looked upon my £2000 as the means by which she would be made happy, and should I withhold it now? All this was passing in my mind, while Dick thought I was considering his half-made suggestion, that if I would lend the money to him, he knew his father would repay it at the time I needed it. I told him that I would walk back to the

hotel with him, and we would after that talk the matter over. I found Alice pale, but gentle and sweet as ever; her cheerfulness made me wonder if Dick had really told her of the danger he stood in. When, however, he went out for some medicine for the baby, the poor girl could restrain herself no longer. She never blamed her husband, but in her anxiety to screen him, and to make me think the best of him, I saw the broken trust and shattered idol. 'I am determined, come what may,' she said, 'I will never lead such another year, deceiving and cheating people, and living on their credulity; but this—oh! John,' and her face grew scared and white, 'can they imprison him or transport him?'

I told her no, and tried to comfort her. I said we should be able to pay the money, and all would be right again. What would the partnership be to me if Dick were a felon and Alice in her grave! Then it struck me as more than probable that Uncle Josh would repay me and thank me for keeping the family name from disgrace. And if he did not, and I never became anything but a clerk on £150 a-year; well,—Mr Dalton would let me stay, and I should do on that.

A year passed, spent in family war-

fare, for as Dick's bills poured in Uncle Josh grew furious. Some of them had been standing for years, notwithstanding the solemn assurances Dick had given his father, each time he had paid his debts, that those he told him of were all he owed. At home the animus was kept up sharply, especially by Nicholas, who constantly said, 'You mustn't be too hard upon him, sir; he knows you have often said the same things before, but have given way. I am sure, with all his faults, if Dick thought you meant it, he wouldn't be so light-hearted.' Then he would repeat some story of Dick's thoughtlessness that would make the old man more hard against him than ever. 'He'll come all right again, Josh,' my father would say; 'only keep him short. That will bring him to his senses, if you don't give way.' Miss Sally didn't hesitate to tell him flatly that she had said years ago, that by bringing Dick up as he had, he was pickling a sharp rod for his own back; 'but it's no use now, you've made a silk purse of the boy, and you can't pull him back into a sow's ear at a day's warning.'

Alice and I could never get Dick to write to his father in the proper strain. He had always taken the high hand, and

though we did all we could he would not lay that tone aside. He wrote letter after letter to no purpose. I wrote. Alice wrote. Sometimes it was to Uncle Josh, sometimes to my father, sometimes to Nicholas, but nothing seemed to soften their hearts. How then could we tell them of what would crush Dick's hopes for ever? At last Uncle Josh determined that he would call in every bill that Dick owed, and pay them. That done, he took a solemn vow never to pay a penny more for him; and as Dick couldn't live on £300 a-year, suppose he should now try £200, and find out how that would suit him. Directly Alice heard this she said, 'Then he must be told of the money John has lent us;' but Dick shirked the proposal, and when he spoke of it again I could see it was only because of the stormy contention Alice and he had evidently had. He tried to say cordially, 'I suppose, Jack, I had better mention your money to the governor. Alice says you'll be wanting it now in a month or so; it's very unfortunate for me, for I know that will settle him at once—much better get the bills off my hands first.' 'Yes, Dick,' replied his wife, 'but it would not be fair to let John run the risk. Your father says he will never pay

another farthing for you.' 'Says!' repeated Dick, angrily; 'hasn't he always said the same thing, and meant it as much as he does now?' But the end of the matter was that Dick had his way. My loan was not mentioned, and we agreed it was best that Alice should know nothing of the affair. 'She doesn't understand my father in the least,' said Dick, 'and has not a notion about business.' But it came into my mind, notwithstanding the consent I had given, that she understood the old man far better than his son did; and, if she had not a notion of business, she had of honour and justice. Was I now beginning to see my mirror of excellency reflecting also selfishness and unscrupulousness?

I suppose every sensible person would have concluded that I had—to use the general expression directed against me when the circumstance became known—'thrown my money away.' The most wonderful thing of all was that nobody seemed to blame Dick for spending the money half so much as they did me for lending it. When the time arrived for my becoming a partner, Dick, although he knew it, and I had spoken to him several times about it, put me off under one pre-

text and another, and had not written to his father. I did not like to tell Mr Dalton the truth, and hesitated and stammered until he said that perhaps I would rather have the conversation renewed after his return from abroad. But when he returned I was no better off, and was obliged to confess that I was not prepared with the money.

I was really miserable. Mr Dalton was evidently surprised and disappointed in me. My father kept writing me letters full of indignation and threatening. Dick positively avoided me. I could not get him to write to Uncle Josh. He always said he would do so next day, but never a line did he send. I could not bear to go to Axleford, and I knew not how to act. At length my requests became too urgent for Dick to hold out any longer. He wrote, and one morning I got a sort of joint epistle from my father and uncle heaping abuse upon me for aiding Dick in his dissipation, and then combining with him to act in strong opposition to his father's wishes. From every point, in fact, I was viewed as being far more reprehensible than my cousin; and as for paying my money back, they laughed at the bare idea. No, I had managed my own affairs, and I

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had best continue to do so. After this—screening the worst, of course—I told Mr Dalton that I had lent my cousin the money at a time when he stood greatly in need of it, that I feared to tell his father at the time, that we both had depended on my uncle repaying me the sum by the time I needed it, but that he now refused to do so, and that both his father and mine blamed me severely.

I think Mr Dalton was sorry for me, though he said he thought that I had acted on impulse, and therefore foolishly. I could not defend myself by exposing Dick; and finding other people so hard upon me, I was glad Mr Dalton blamed me for nothing worse than folly, and allowed me to remain in the house as a clerk.

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### III.

AND now it is ten years since all this happened. I am a clerk still. Many changes have come to others, few to me. My brother Sam is dead, universally regretted, as the newspapers said. Poor

Sam! I think he was sometimes kind to me; as a boy he did not cuff me about as Nicholas did, at all events.

My father, too, has gone. He kept his word, and left me nothing. He always said that he wasn't going to leave any of his hard-earned money to be squandered by a blockhead who could not keep his own. However, I dare say the poor old man did not mean so much as he said, for Nicholas declares there was nothing to leave but the business, and that is entirely in his hands. There is a provision that if I am ever in want, he is to allow me something. My father, I know, meant well, but, thank God, it has never come to that, nor do I think it ever will.

Uncle Josh is just dead, and the lawyer has sent for Alice and the boy. Can the old man have thought of them? Oh, I hope so, although ever since poor Dick's death, four years ago, he has never been the same; never able to sign his name, Nicholas says. How wonderful it seems to think of Uncle Josh and my father being in fear and subjection to Nicholas! But so they were; they dared not advance a suggestion or give an opinion when he was present. They never played the tyrant to one of their clerks more than he did to them of

later years. Uncle Josh quite cringed to Nicholas, though he had 'willed' to him every penny he possessed, and never spoke of his absent son. Still the father had not quite driven the poor prodigal from his heart, for when he heard that he had died suddenly, almost alone, in a foreign land, he never was the same again, and soon sunk into a helpless state.

Yes, Dick has been dead four years, and with him died those years when he was so changed and altered, so untrue to us and to himself. He got into a bad set in London, and could not free himself, but it was with the intention of amendment that he started for America. There had been a great coolness between us, but he couldn't go away, poor fellow, with that feeling, and when we parted after a long conversation, in which he blamed himself for all that we had suffered, and made perhaps too much of what I had done for him, I believe our hearts were as warm to each other as when we were boys. 'Think of me, Jack, as an altered and a better man; for I have taken a vow to become such, and by God's help I will keep my word.'

And shall I rake up our bitterness? No, Dick; God saw your heart, with the

good resolutions He had put in it, and perhaps, knowing that you lacked strength of purpose, took you while yet they were strong and fresh. Dick, my boyish hero! I owe much to you. Your tales of honour and fairness gave me a love for what I saw little of; the affection you inspired expanded a heart withering for want of nourishment. For twenty years of my life, there was scarce a ray of sunlight that was not in some way reflected by you or on you. So the debt is not all on one side; and though there have been times when—with no one to give my whole love to, with you avoiding me, and my friends all looking coldly on me—I may have had bitter feelings towards you; yet remembering all, I know that I should still do the same by you. One thing Dick confessed to me: he had never told his father the whole circumstances; so, perhaps, had Uncle Josh known the worst he would not have condemned me so harshly.

Poor Dick! you have left all your brightness for us to remember in your boy. That is why I feel so dull and heavy now he is away, for I am his companion, confidant, instructor, and playfellow. Alice often laughs a really merry laugh, to see us at our games, when I am always beaten,

or at his lessons, when I am often puzzled, for he is a perfect genius, and far in advance of me, though I pretend to instruct him. He must turn out well with such a mother, for during these dark, weary years, Alice has shown us 'how divine a thing a woman may be made:' cheerful, tender, calm, trusting, always ready to believe in amendment, and never bringing up disappointments and grievous failures. I never made any intimate friends in London, but I was always sure of a welcome from Alice and the boy; and it seemed a matter of course that we should spend all holidays together. Left by myself, I feel more lonely than I could have thought. Ah well! I must cheer myself by writing to Charlie, and he will tell me what he thinks of the old place. How I should like to be there, and point out the fields I loved so much when a boy, and where I began my collection of moths and butterflies which he so delights in! I should take him down to Fernhill Well, and there—a letter for me? and from Alice, too. . . . .

## IV.

It is a year—a whole year—since those last words were written, and I am looking over my papers because I am leaving my lodgings. The letter I received then was to tell me that, notwithstanding Nicholas had a will leaving Uncle Josh's money to him, the old man had made another immediately after, leaving all to his son. He had never the power to alter it after poor Dick's death, so the money belonged to Alice and her boy. They sent for me, of course, to share their joy, and a special invitation from Miss Sally. Miss Sally is younger than ever, and I believe never enjoyed anything in her life so thoroughly as Nick's disappointment and fury. The only time we all met, the old lady made herself really offensive to him, at which I was surprised, for he was very attentive to her. She ended one conversation with, 'There are fools, John Thompson,' looking at me and meaning me, I know, 'and there are rogues, Nicholas Thompson,' fixing that terrible eye on Nick: 'with age

the former sometimes improve; but the latter, bah!' and here her expressive countenance gave such an unmistakable meaning to her words that I did not wonder at Nick's silence after that.

When I came back to London I felt more alone than ever, and not half so happy as when I used to deny myself in order to put apart something that Charlie might have a treat in the country, or go to the pantomime. It was no self-denial, for I enjoyed it fully as much as he did. I felt somehow very low-spirited when Alice wrote to say that, now affairs were settled, she could pay me back my money. It was the kindest, sweetest letter woman ever penned, but it made my heart ache to think that I could be of no more service to her, and that when I went to see her it would not be to find things put aside for me to do, or to hear her say, 'I was waiting until you came, John, to hear *your* opinion.' Ah, Alice! did you see that when I wrote? In spite of myself, did my heart betray its sorrow? I suppose so, for one evening, to my utter amazement, I walked Alice, Charlie, and Miss Sally Noggs. The latter, sitting herself down, said, 'Well, John Thompson, perhaps you've heard that one fool makes many; and never was it more

fully proved than in your having brought us all up to London.'

During the evening—such a happy one—Alice made tea, and my dull old room was turned into a palace of delight. I found out that Miss Sally knew all about poor Dick. Alice had told her everything, and I was not quite sure whether I was in my right senses, or whether the journey had not been too much for the old lady, when she suddenly got up, slapped me on the back, gripped my hand, and said, 'John Thompson, I am proud of you; our family owe you a debt they can never pay. You saved our good name.' Fancy being proud of 'the blockhead,' the 'fool of the family!' My head swam round and grew dizzy, as well it might; for Alice was kneeling at my side, her tears dropping fast upon my hand, which she held in hers. Miss Sally at this moment went out of the room, declaring that she must get another handkerchief, as she had a cold, which she said from the first she should catch through standing in that station. I do not know how long she stayed away, but when she came back, and I tried to tell her that my heart was overflowing with joy, since Alice had said she would be my wife, she put her hands in ours and said, 'I always saw how this would end, and I am glad I was



right. Worldly wisdom is a very good thing, but unless it is tempered with a wisdom that teaches mercy and charity, it fails to bring happiness. You have helped me to feel this, John Thompson; and now I can forgive you for being a boy. I should have been proud had you been called Noggs, and I wish I had not said, "Call the little blockhead John!"



## 'HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.'

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**B**AT-TAT — that's the postman — two letters for Mrs Olinthus Lobb, Cedar Villa, Putney, and Charlotte says, 'If you please, ma'am, two letters for you.' Nonsense, I must be dreaming, and I shall awake to find myself still Miss Britannia Plummidge.

I have been married six weeks last Wednesday, and yet now, when anybody suddenly calls me Mrs Lobb, I have to pinch myself to make sure I am still flesh and blood. Ah! young people get accustomed to things quickly; but when you have been called by one name for forty-seven years, it seems impossible ever to change it. However, I've changed mine, by a miracle, for nothing short of one can effect a marriage in Binfield. I am sure I do not wish to speak against my native

place. It is the sweetest village in England, and for maiden ladies a most advantageous locality as regards economy and society, but, in my present position, I may make bold to say it *has* one drawback. There are no bachelors in it; boys abound, promising youths with nothing to do are not uncommon, but a man with position and an income, however small, is never seen in Binfield without a wife by his side. Is it any wonder then that I, not at all a beauty, should have some little bewilderment in identifying myself as wife of Olinthus Lobb, Esq., and mistress of Cedar Villa?

Now I am going to tell how it all happened. Pamela and I are the daughters of a Colonel in the army. He had retired as long ago as I can remember; and when he died he left us our little cottage and £60 a year. He denied himself many a comfort to do this, and the memory of our father is very dear to us. We tried to do as he would have wished us, and some years ago when Mr Thompson, a most respectable man, but a miller, offered me his hand and heart, Pamela said, 'No, we have our father's position to maintain.' So I had to decline, very reluctantly I must own, for he was a widower, and my heart seemed to long to take care of those two dear little

girls. After that one offer I never got another, and I began to resign myself to what seemed my ordained portion. Not that this was an easy task, for I am not like Pam. She is a very extraordinary woman; indeed many people say she ought to be a man. Pam is one of those people who never give way, and I really could not say which is strongest, her mind or her body, both being gigantic. If she has been walking about all day and is brought to confess that she is a little tired, the only way you ever see her take her ease is by sitting bolt upright in her chair. The suggestion of a sofa or couch would be met by a withering look of scorn, only to be produced by one of those long noses with a bump in the middle. Pam is very proud of the family nose. I have often looked at her when in repose—I mean after she has retired—lying with her arms crossed, really reminding one of those noble crusaders, or figures of the middle ages, one sees in cathedrals.

Things in this life go by contraries, else why was not I christened Pamela and she Britannia? Our mother so admired the novel, that she begged her first-born might be called by the heroine's sweet name. This was one of the few occasions on which my father gave way, but even

then conditionally—that he should choose the name of the second ; and he chose the name of Britannia, and, unfortunately, I was the second. When we were children he always called me *his* chick, and if we had a dispute he invariably whistled or hummed 'Rule Britannia.' But this did not last long, for no one could rule Pam. Even as a child, I felt her mental superiority. Why, at school I remember her repeating all the rules of grammar, perfectly ; scorning to copy the answer of a sum ; and positively understanding the use of the globes. There was but one occasion on which I felt the gratification of superiority, and that was when, during the dancing lesson, I caught our dear mother's approving smile as she watched me. Pam detested dancing, for having very long thin limbs, she did not show to advantage in that accomplishment. I am still an admirer of Terpsichore, but if I stand up for a quadrille with the children, I always feel I am making myself ridiculous in Pam's eyes. I am very fond of children and young people, and nothing has made me more pleased than when some dear girl, whom I have known from a child, has confided to me her little love story.

I am afraid Pam is right. I am rather romantic. I have often felt so sorry for

myself that I had no early love story of my own to look back upon—it keeps one's heart young and fresh. Pam says women were meant for higher things than sitting thinking of lovers and whom they shall marry. Well, of course, she is right, but I really do not know that the women who take to chemistry, astronomy, and all the ologies, are a bit the happier or more amiable; and I am sure some of the sweetest natures and kindest hearts I have met with, have belonged to pretty vain pussies who delighted in turning the heads of all the men they met, no matter whether they were eighteen or eighty. I must confess I have often felt grateful that men *are* weak. Nobody can thoroughly understand this unless it has been their privilege to be associated with a strong-minded superior woman. Dear me! what a repose they are then! I feel it must have been a great trial to dear Pam to live with me, not being a kindred mind. When I have thought her feeling dull on this account, and have tried to get up a little argument, how completely I have failed—my knowledge has utterly forsaken me. And positively, sometimes, I had imagined from her silence that she was getting interested! But when I got to the end of my say, then she would fix her eye upon me with,

'Britannia, may I ask you, as a personal favour, never to display your lamentable ignorance "before a third person."' Either this, or I committed a *lapsus lingue* in my mode of expression, and then, trying feebly to defend myself on the score of Walker or Maunder, Pam would demand, in a voice which seemed to run cold down my backbone, 'May I ask who Walker and Maunder may be?' I really felt quite confused, because I had not the slightest idea, for, except in the dictionaries, I never heard of either of the gentlemen. It is certainly most provoking in me to be so stupid; and one of my great pleasures now is, to hope that by sending many nice comforts to my dear sister I shall prove I have not been unmindful of her forbearance.

So Pam and I began to get old—she got thinner and I got fatter. The people we remembered as grown up when we were young, dropped off one by one. It seemed such a long time since we were children; everything was altered; what were facts then were idle stories now; boys and girls of ten and twelve put me to the blush—the parts of speech were entirely confused. Places which used to be in one country were in another now. There was no William Tell, and no Joan of Arc. Henry



VIII. was a good fatherly man, and Richard III., instead of 'wading to the throne in the blood of his dearest relatives,' lived and died an exemplary brother and uncle. People we had seen married were grandfathers and grandmothers; children we had seen christened had boys and girls who called us Old Pam and the Ancient Briton.

Binfield is about twenty miles from London. It was our rule to go to town twice a year to receive our dividends, to buy any special article of dress we needed, and to feast our eyes on the tempting beauties displayed in the shop windows. This had been a plan of our dear father's, and during the London day we often spoke of him—how surprised he would have been at this alteration, at that improvement, or how pleased to see something which drew forth our wonder or admiration. On this particular occasion Pam had been staying with a friend of ours at Pentonville, and we agreed that we should meet to do our business, spend the day, and return home together in the evening. I always felt quite knocked up after one of those days; but we could not accept our friend's invitation to stay the night, as we had a return ticket. Travelling is expensive, and Pam said our position obliged us to go

first class. Dear! dear! I have sometimes been led to ask myself why money and position do not always go together. The one is very trying without the other. The many things we have been obliged to do, and also to do without, because it would not become our position! Pam would never hear of a charwoman, but we must have a servant. And, really, girls have enormous appetites and very ungrateful dispositions, or our Susan never could have said we were mean. But perhaps I'm hard on the poor thing. Had she known how often Pam and I declared to each other we couldn't eat another morsel—though far from being satisfied—in order that she might have a good dinner, she would not, I think, have said we were mean.

But to return to the morning on which I was to go to London alone. Five minutes to nine the train was to start; but I was so afraid of not being in time, that I was ready at half-past seven. It being ridiculous to leave home at that hour, I took up a book—not that I could read either, because of the unpleasant feeling that I might forget something which Pam would be certain to ask for. Eight o'clock struck. It would only take twenty minutes to walk slowly to the station, and I had then half

an hour to spare. No matter, I would start at the quarter past, in case of accidents. And a very fortunate thing it was I did start; for I had passed Bull's Cross when I discovered I had no pocket-handkerchief. However, I had time to hurry back and put one in my pocket. Ah! how little I thought that that trifling incident would be the means of bringing about the great event of my life!

When I reached the platform I looked about, but saw nobody I knew. The guard put me into an empty carriage, and though several of our gentlemen passed they only nodded 'good morning.' So alone I started, but not to remain alone long, for at every station people got in and got out until we reached Chingford. Here I thought I was to be left by myself again, but just as the train was moving off a middle-aged gentleman rushed up. The guard opened the door of my carriage, and he was obliged to jump in, making use, as I thought, of such an improper expression that if Pamela had been there she would certainly have given him in charge. But our ears often deceive us. I have since found out that he merely remarked, on finding a lady alone, '*dame seule.*' Still at the time I felt rather indignant, and looked at the offender with some curiosity. He was a very thin, tall

man, and so oddly dressed, that I began to feel a little uncomfortable, and wish some one else was in the carriage with me. Why should he wear white trousers? The day was not warm. Were they made of duck or jean? I suppose I must have been scanning his garb, for presently he said in a loud voice—

'Well, madam, may I ask if you see anything peculiar in my dress that you are honouring it with so much attention?'

I really thought I must have sunk through the seat of the carriage. Oh, if Pamela had been there! I tried to stammer out an apology, and he waved his hand with what seemed an ironical leer, saying, 'Oh, no offence, no offence.' Well, what with my confusion and annoyance, I was ready to faint. I felt I must have a little air, so without a thought I pulled down the window. In an instant he fired out again—

'Bless me, madam, you are quite at liberty to commit suicide, of course, but you don't want to commit murder too.'

Murder! suicide! Oh, dear, dear, what should I do! would the train never reach the next station! He must have seen my terror, for he said—

'There, there, don't look as if you thought I was mad; but if you suffered

from rheumatism as I do, madam, you'd look upon a person who put you in a draught as your natural enemy.'

I certainly felt devoutly thankful now that Pamela was not with me, or there would have been quite a scene. We stopped once more and took in two ladies and a gentleman. The train moved on, and soon I heard my gruff neighbour tut-tutting, and muttering something he would do to somebody, when I discovered that his nose was beginning to bleed, and he was searching vainly in his pocket for a handkerchief.

I must confess my first feeling was not one of sorrow for him. He had been what I considered offensive to me—an unprotected female with nobody to retaliate for her; but then I remembered how near I had been in a similar plight to his: had I not started at the time I did, I should have been minus a handkerchief too. I involuntarily put my hand in my pocket. Yes, there it lay neatly folded up; but I would not take it out to make matters worse by unnecessary display. At this time the poor gentleman was obliged to put his head out of the window. The ladies exchanged looks expressive of anything but pleasure; the young man eyed him with a stare of the most profound indifference, as

if it were the usual thing to travel with people who chose that their noses should bleed ; and he did not desire to interfere with him, only he wished to impress upon us that *he* was at no loss, for he produced a spotless handkerchief, slowly shook it out, and used it most unnecessarily, and I thought heartlessly ; and then a small voice began to whisper, ' Britannia Plummidge, are you acting a Christian's part ? Have you never heard a story of a good Samaritan ? '

I put my hand into my pocket again ; I tried to feel if it was one of my best handkerchiefs. I argued that if I had two it would be different, but you were not supposed to distress yourself for somebody you didn't know. Why, one might do nothing else but give away pocket-handkerchiefs ! Then there was Pamela ; she would never approve of it, and must never know of it. Oh, it was exactly like one of my Quixotic fits. I might be quite certain I was making myself ridiculous, and I resolved to entertain the notion no longer. But, in spite of trying to look at the passing scenery, and to consider what I should purchase, how best lay out my small amount of money, memory *would* recall the ' sweet story of old,' and I could but hang my head from a feeling that I was not one of those who tried to ' go and do likewise.'

A Plummidge hang her head! My father's daughter ashamed to look the whole world in the face! I am one of the weak specimens of my sex, I know; but at that moment Pamela herself could not have felt more bold. Without a moment's hesitation I handed my nice new handkerchief, embroidered with 'B. P.' in the corner, saying—

'I am afraid, sir, you are put to inconvenience. Will you accept this? I shall not require it.'

I could not see his face; but from the side glance I got, I think it wore an expression of great astonishment. However, he took the handkerchief without a word, and I quite imagined he did not intend thanking me. Presently he drew in his head, his face looking redder than ever by the close proximity of the white handkerchief, and said—

'Madam, I am obliged to you—very much obliged to you. Madam, you're an angel. You're more: you're a woman, and the only one in the carriage, too.'

Here he perfectly glared at the two ladies, who didn't seem to mind it; though, had it been me, I should have felt as if I could have shrunk into a nutshell.

We were soon at our journey's end. My companion helped me out with the

greatest politeness, and then, with the manners of a courtier, said, 'May I be permitted to inquire where I shall have the pleasure of returning this?' still holding the handkerchief in his hand.

Now this was embarrassing. Pamela might blame me severely; and I should never hear the last of my indelicate liberty. Yet I felt I should like to get my handkerchief back. So after a moment I told him not to trouble himself, but should he be passing the station, he might give it to the guard of the Binfield train, directed to 'Miss B. Plummidge, Binfield Station, to be left until called for.' He lifted his hat, and I was soon looking out for an omnibus to take me to the appointed meeting-place with Pamela.

She was there, and we spent a delightful day. After we had done our business and shopping, we went to a museum in Jermyn Street, where there were stones and fossils, about which dear Pamela seemed to know much more than the gentleman who showed us over. She caught him tripping two or three times; and this put her in such good humour that she stopped before all the shops in Regent Street where I wanted to look in. Now, this was very kind, for I am sure any one who could even recollect those dreadful names



of things which existed before Adam and Noah must feel it a great come-down to be asked to look at French muslins at ten-and-sixpence, and bonnets, 'as worn in Paris,' at one guinea.

I experienced some little inconvenience from the want of my handkerchief, such as when Pam would tell me to take a 'black' off my nose. I had then to contrive to get behind her, and furtively rub it off with my glove. Tired enough we were when we reached home that night, but we had seen plenty to think of and to talk about. The next week passed rapidly enough, when one evening, as Pam and I were taking a walk near the station, one of the porters came up and said to me—

'If you please, Miss, there's a parcel for you here. I should have brought it up, but it says "to be left till called for."'

Was ever anything so unfortunate? I felt I was getting red, and that Pamela's eye was on me. It is certainly a great misfortune to be such a weak creature as I am. I felt guilty of quite a crime at that moment, and by a great effort could only stammer out something about a person's nose bleeding, and that I had lent them my handkerchief. If Pamela would only not ask if the person were a man or a woman, and if I could but conceal that it

was I who offered the handkerchief! Vain thought! In five minutes I felt that Pam had turned me inside out, and shaken every scrap of the affair out of me.

She preserved a solemn silence, and we reached the station and met the porter with a large brown-paper parcel.

'There must be some mistake,' I said; 'mine was but a pocket-handkerchief.'

I hesitated and debated; but hesitation and debating were cut short by Pam desiring the man to take the parcel to our house; and an ominous silence was maintained till we reached home.

I remember with what trepidation I then asked whether we had not better open the parcel, and see what was in it; and, though Pamela was dying of curiosity, she only said she had no desire to interfere with me in such a matter. So I cut the string, and soon my bewildered eyes were fixed on a pink brocaded silk, so rich and stiff, that it would have stood alone. But there was no name, no handkerchief, nothing. I couldn't describe Pamela's wrath, nor my distress. I only know that that evening I felt that henceforth I was to be regarded as a bold woman, and a disgrace to the name of Plumidge.

And what was to be done with the unfortunate parcel? I couldn't keep it,

and I couldn't send it back, because I didn't know the name of the sender. Why did I lend my handkerchief? and, when I did lend it, why was I so mean as ever want to have it back again?

Matters stood thus when we received an invitation to dinner from our doctor's wife. Now, we often went out to tea, or to small evening parties; but the circle in which we moved, in Binfield, was not much given to asking friends to dine. So this was rather an event for us. Pam became a trifle more gracious, and by the day named she was almost herself. I could have hugged her, I felt so glad not to feel the Pariah I had done for the last ten days. Pam looked very well—quite handsome I thought. I am the best work-woman, and I had trimmed her black silk with some nice lace a cousin of ours had given me, and felt quite proud of my work and my sister.

I was too taken up with the delight of having all pleasant again to think much about how I looked. Besides, Pam is so clever that people were not in the habit of taking much notice of me, unless they were deaf or invalids, and then they seemed to like to talk to me. Quite prepared to enjoy myself at Dr Fletcher's, I entered the drawing-room behind Pam,

when—oh, it couldn't be—yes, it was—there on the sofa sat my eccentric friend of the railway carriage. I am perfectly sure if my nerves hadn't given way I should have rushed out. As it was, everything and everybody seemed swimming about the room; a gurgling of water sounded in my ears, and a voice seemed to come from a long way off, whispering, 'Mr Olinthus Lobb, Miss Britannia Plum-midge.' For fully ten minutes I had not the slightest idea what any one said or did. However, when I seemed to return to the world about me, everybody was talking most agreeably to everybody else, and I began to breathe again, especially when I saw that my friend did not intend showing that we had ever met before. We spent a delightful evening. Pam was quite charmed with our new acquaintance. He gave way to her, agreed with her opinions, and, though he took but little notice of me, treated us both with the greatest politeness.

I declare I thought Pam had made a conquest when he insisted on seeing us home, and asked permission to call and inquire after us the next morning. Pam had found out that Mr Lobb was an old friend of Dr Fletcher's, and under the shield of a fiery, quick manner, and very

eccentric appearance, was always doing the kindest actions, which he would never acknowledge, or permit himself to be thanked for. Mrs Fletcher said she advised the unmarried ladies to look after him, as he was very well off, and devoted to ladies, though, from having had an early disappointment, and spending most of his life in India and China, he had never been married.

That night, when Pam had left me, I opened my drawers and looked at the pink brocade, and smiled to think, that after all I might wear that 'bone of contention' at Pam's wedding, and that then she might be more indulgent about my indelicate boldness in offering my handkerchief to a stranger. I made up my mind to speak to him about the parcel, should I have an opportunity, as in case of nothing coming of his attentions I could send it back. But I would be very careful in my manner and in what I said, so as not to endanger my dear sister's prospects.

A week passed, and still Mr Lobb was at Binfield. He had a room at the 'Dragon,' and his attentions were getting almost pointed. I never dared breathe my thoughts to Pam, not knowing how she would take it; but when it came to inviting the Fletchers and ourselves to a

little picnic, and he giving Pam his arm most of the way, I began to think she must see that all this meant something. I had never been able to speak to him; but the day after the picnic he called. Pam was out, so I mustered up courage, and told him of the parcel I had received, which I was sure had come from him; and though I knew how kindly he meant it, still I thought I would rather not accept it, as——

‘As what?’ he said. ‘You think this little trifle came from me, and yet you won’t accept it? Now, I tell you what it is, Miss Britannia, I will offer you something else, and if you refuse that—why, I’ll—I’ll burn the dress, and I’ll return—no I won’t—whatever comes I’ll keep that handkerchief;’ and upon the spot he offered me his hand and heart, and asked me to be Mrs Lobb.

I was never more surprised, though Pam said afterwards if she ever allowed thoughts of the kind to enter her mind she should have had her suspicions. But I cannot tell how thankful I was to find Pam had not taken his attentions as meaning anything but a tribute to her superiority.

I used to smile sometimes as I saw what an amusement I and my old lover

were to the young people. They could not comprehend the quiet enjoyment we looked forward to in going down the hill of life together; they were rather frightened at the red face and sharp voice, and could not understand that his heart was as fresh as that of the youngest of those who laughed.

I was pleased to find that many people would miss me and be sorry to lose me; and when we were married, notwithstanding Mr Lobb gave my old people a dinner, and my school children a treat, there were sad faces at parting. My dear husband says he is getting all his sharp edges rasped off, and he knows his friends think him hen-pecked, and pity him. Not a day passes without my making some fresh discovery of his goodness and consideration; already he has a scheme in his head for the settlement of dear Pam. I hardly know whether to desire it, though. If she were not such a superior person I should have no hesitation, for certainly the greatest happiness a woman can know is to have some one to lean upon and protect her, and whom, in her turn, she can look after, and be of use to. Still my sister would never value this privilege as I do. She is far above all the weaknesses of our frail sex, and I think perhaps, all things

considered, she and Mr Potter might not be comfortable together. When I venture to say so to Mr Lobb (for though I *call* him Olinthus, I don't seem able to *think* of him as that yet), he pooh-poohs all my scruples, saying he knows Sam Potter better than I do,—which, of course, is perfectly correct, for he possesses an amazing insight into character, and manages people in a wonderful way. At first I used to feel quite nervous at his joking with Pam, but somehow she takes things from him which she wouldn't from any one else, and so she possibly might the suggestion of a husband. Mr Potter is a most amiable, kind man. He never comes to see us without bringing me quite a handsome present, which I should be perfectly contented with, only he always seems to have been undecided between two things, and finally to have decided on the wrong one; and the whole of his visit he does nothing but lament that he has not brought the thing which he has left behind. Mr Lobb laughs at me for feeling uncomfortable on this score; he says it is little Sam's way, and I suppose it has been the poor man's failing through life, for during the time he and Mr Lobb were in China he made up his mind he would get married. Many years before, he had met two sisters in



England, and was only prevented then from making his offer because he could not decide between them; and this indecision still worried him. At length, however, he resolved upon writing to the younger of the two; she accepted his offer, consented to go out to him, and all things seemed favourable, except that a feeling of regret immediately entered into his mind that he had not selected the other one. He began recalling all her amiable qualities, accomplishments, good looks—things he had never remembered before his fate was comparatively settled. Unfortunately my dear husband was obliged to go to Japan about this time, or he would never have allowed his friend to act so foolishly; but I am sorry to say that on her arrival Mr Potter permitted the lady to discover his vain regret that she was not her sister. My dear husband says she was one of my sort, which means, poor thing, that she was a weak, foolish body; and so plain did it seem to her that, if she married him, she should be standing in her sister's light, that she insisted on returning to England,—and, as I said at the time Mr Lobb related it, I should have done the same.

'Then,' exclaimed Pam, 'you would have done a very foolish thing. If the man did not know his own mind, it was

her place to teach him ;' at which Mr Lobb (for he doesn't hesitate with Pam one bit) slapped her heartily on the back, and said she was the woman he took her for.

Well, to continue my story, when the lady told the reason of her return, her friends all blamed her for acting foolishly, her sister positively refused to go out in her place, and poor Mr Potter was left a bachelor, feeling himself bound in some way to two ladies, neither of whom would marry him. All this happened nearly twenty years ago. Since then he has quite lost sight of them, and though he is as anxious as ever to get settled, he has not been fortunate enough to find a person to suit him. Now that Mr Lobb is married, he is worse off than ever, for he has nobody to make up his mind for him, and he really seems to be thoroughly uncomfortable. He and Pam have met several times. And now Mr Lobb (should we go sight-seeing) always says, 'Pam, my dear, I put my friend Potter under your wing ;' and after that we don't see much more of them, but I think they enjoy themselves, for upon our return dear Pam seems in a good temper. And as for Mr Potter, he is never tired of talking to me about my sister's supe-

riority and intellect, and he has told my husband that he considers Pam to be an uncommonly fine woman, and (in answer to a little joking from Mr Lobb) that he only wished he had a chance, he should be proud of laying at her feet his fortune (which is a very comfortable one), and the name of Potter (which I believe is exceedingly respectable, for he always puts great stress upon their being 'the Suffolk Potters, not the Lincolnshire Potters, you know,'—though I'm sure I don't know, but Pam evidently does, because she said she was glad of that). Pam is very open with him, she speaks her mind and gives her opinion most freely. I really felt quite uncomfortable at the way she went on when he lost her umbrella; she insisted on its being downright carelessness, and turned a deaf ear to his excuses, until he had to give in, and admit that it *was* carelessness; and after that she seemed better satisfied, although when he replaced it with a beautiful green silk one, she told him (rather unnecessarily, I thought) to remember this was not the one he had lost, about which there could be no mistake, for we had had our brown umbrellas for at least six years, and they only cost us 7 shillings and 11 pence in St Paul's Churchyard, in the first instance.

I dwell a great deal upon my sister's prospects, for her happiness is very dear to me, and it is exceedingly difficult to decide what is best for those so much above oneself in resources of their own. I have been rather strengthened in the thought that the idea is not wholly displeasing to her, since Mr Lobb, the last time she came here, addressed her as Mrs Potter, and (though she held up her finger reprovably) she positively smiled. One of these letters is from her; perhaps she may say whether she intends coming to see us next week or not.

'Gracious me! Mr Lobb! Olinthus!' I exclaim, as my husband, having just returned from town, comes into the room. 'What do you think?'

'Why, that your sister has consented to become Mrs Potter. I met the little man coming to tell us in a state of the greatest excitement. He considers she has done him the most extraordinary honour, and he told me at least twenty times that she is a most wonderful woman.'

'Well, Pamela is by no means an ordinary person; I never cease wondering how it was you chose me instead of her.'

'Ha, ha, ha! we two should never have saddled together. No, no, my dear, there'd have been nothing left of old Lin

Lobb then; there's very little now except his duck inexpressibles;' and he adds, looking at me with his kind twinkling eyes, 'Those I'll never leave off, for they first attracted the attention of the woman who has made me the happiest man in England.'



## TRETHILL FARM.

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### I.



TRETHILL FARM was the most rambling, old-fashioned, inconvenient place you ever saw, yet it was most picturesquely situated. After having toiled up Parson's Hill, and enjoyed the view from it, you then went down the lane, across Warleigh Woods, and suddenly came upon the quaintest old house in the world, with black beams and diamond-paned windows. There was a green plat in front, with a big walnut-tree growing in it, and close by a water-mill that charmed the eyes and ears of everybody except the inhabitants of the farm. Let us look in upon them now sitting in the large old kitchen, as the day draws to its close.

The tall, handsome woman, with the

white net cap and grey gown, you can see is the mistress of the house. She is fidgeting her fingers because it is too dark for her to work any longer, though she has been busy all day, for to sit idle is neither rest nor enjoyment to Kate Bradford. The man with the dreamy face and the yellow curly hair like a boy's (though he has passed his fifty summers), who is just now nodding over his pipe, is John Bradford—not the master of the house, but only the mistress's husband. And now for the two pretty things sitting side by side on the window seat, straining their eyes over a musty old book. Which is the elder of the two? Esty, the fair-haired one with the dark grey eyes, and a face which looks all the paler beside that of Kitty, who is like 'a red red rose,' has rippling hair the colour of a new-podded chestnut, with big brown eyes, and a figure that makes her the very queen of rustic beauties.

'Come, come, girls,' says the mother, 'do put away that book, or to-morrow you'll have eyes like ferrets. Much better you was out breathing the fresh air than cramming your heads with such nonsense.'

'Oh, mother! why, it's a lovely story. Only read it,' exclaims soft-voiced Esther.

'Read it, indeed! not I. I had enough



of your lovely stories in that "Romance of the Forest," which your father was always talking about; and such a pack of trash for anybody to waste their precious time writing and reading!

'What's that about me and my favourite book?' asks John, rousing himself. 'Well, I can remember the fancy I took to that book—it made me want the girls to read it, for I was about their age when it turned my head.'

'Oh, well, that ain't saying much for it!' retorts Mrs Bradford. 'It never takes much to turn an empty thing. But there goes nine o'clock, so be off, all of you; it'll be up ten, now, before you can be in bed,' and she bustles off to look and see if the cupboards and safes are locked and bolted. At this John commences to knock out the ashes from his pipe, Esther and Kitty to shut up their book, and reluctantly betake themselves to their little room.

John Bradford was half farmer, half miller. He was not obliged to work hard, nor had he any great anxiety about crops, his wife's father having left a goodish bit of money when he died, more, in fact, than people gave the old miser credit for having. Then they had but the two girls, Esther and Kitty, whom they had sent to

the neighbouring town to school, where they were kept until Esther was eighteen. Now they had been home a year, and Kate Bradford sometimes asked herself if she had been quite wise in keeping her girls away from home so long. Kitty seemed disposed to take to country life and to try to fascinate the best-looking of the young farmers round about; but with Esther it was quite different.

‘The child don’t give herself airs, or I’d soon take ’em out of her, but she’s like a fish out of water amongst our folk. However, I’m determined one of the two shall marry Randal Carey. I lost his father for myself, but the son shan’t slip through my fingers easily.’ So thought Mrs Bradford to herself; and, with these views in her mind, her consent had been easily obtained for the girls going next day to a picnic, returning by Crayshaws, old Mrs Carey’s house, and staying there for tea and a dance.

The sun had scarce risen next morning, when two eager faces were anxiously looking to see if the day would be fine. Yes; there was not a cloud visible.

‘Oh, Esty! it is going to be lovely; we *shall* enjoy ourselves. I’m so glad, ain’t you?’

‘Yes—very,’ answers Esty.

‘Then why on earth don’t you show it, as I do!’ And she catches hold of Esty and whirls her round.

‘Kitty, how absurd you are! I know the reason you are so glad—because you will meet Randal Carey; but I—there will be nobody there I shall care for.’

‘Yes, perhaps there will; for Randal has let the Erme fishing again to the gentleman who had it two years ago. He stops at the “Roebuck,” and I dare say he will be there. Randal says he is not good-looking, but a very nice gentleman, and he’ll be better than nobody.’

At eleven o’clock, Esty and Kitty, in their fresh pretty muslins and white straw hats, are carefully settled in the light spring cart by their mother, while their father stands in the doorway and sings, ‘How happy could I be with either!’ Phoebe and Ann, the two maids, look with eyes of longing admiration; the dogs run round and round, barking and jumping at the nose of Mischief, the old pony, who, suddenly waking up to the general excitement, feels it incumbent upon him to try and start off, obliging Seth to jump up. So away they go, the girls kissing their hands, and nodding their pretty heads, to the group of admirers they leave behind.

‘ Well, I’m glad they’re off,’ says Mrs Bradford, with a sigh of relief; ‘ it’s been warm work getting them ready; and as for that Kitty, she’s as vain as a peacock.’

‘ And no wonder,’ replies the father. ‘ Why, there isn’t a prettier maid than our Kitty in all Devonshire. I’ve heard great talk about the Plymouth girls, but I never see one there to touch her.’

‘ Oh, “every cook praises his own stew.” I dare say if you asked old Tucker, he’d say he never see a girl like his Hephzibah.’

‘ Well,’ laughs John, ‘ he’d be pretty right there, for her squint is most *uncommon*.’

Mrs Bradford, feeling John has been sharper than usual, wishes to know if he intends standing there all day, hurries Phoebe one way, Ann the other, and very soon is deep in the mysteries of the dairy. Then she will look after chickens and ducks, see to fruit for market and fruit for preserving, and how much butter she can spare. Such duties, with household arrangements and needlework, occupy her until day closes again.

John has gone to bed, ten o’clock has struck, and she sits in the kitchen alone, listening for the wheels to tell her that the girls have returned. The front door is set

open, but not a sound enters. Nothing breaks the stillness, save the loud tick of the old eight-day clock. Most women, tired after the busy day, would have sat drowsily unoccupied. But not so Kate Bradford. The stocking she is darning certainly progresses more slowly than it might have done in the morning, but this is only because she is allowing her thoughts to run riot.

At length the sound of wheels, and girlish voices, and subdued laughter, tell her that Esty and Kitty are at the door.

‘Oh, mother,’ they both cry out.

‘Hush, hush, now,’ whispers the mother; ‘don’t make a noise, and wake everybody up. Stand to Mischief’s head, Kitty, while Seth comes in to get his pasty and jug of cider, and then there’ll be no call for opening doors again.’

Kitty obeys, and soon they are telling their mother, in subdued whispers, how they have enjoyed the day, how they had dinner in the woods, and then walked back to Crayshaws to tea.

‘We had such lots of partners,’ Kitty says: ‘everybody asked us to dance; and, mother, what do you think? Esty has such a grand admirer. Guess who it is!’

The mother looks quickly from one to the other, and can’t tell at all. Esty

blushes her deepest shell-pink, and tells Kitty not to be silly. Kitty laughs, and points to the tell-tale colour, while she says—

‘Why, the gentleman from London, who has the Erme fishing, Mr Arthur Vane. He danced with her three times, and walked from the woods with her, though both the Miss Rickets, the Rector’s daughters, were there.’

‘Well, and who paid you attention?’

‘Me—oh, everybody; first one, and then the other.’

‘But who did Randal dance with?’

‘Why, mother,’ cried Esty, ‘with Kitty, to be sure; he is always talking to her and laughing with her. He never finds anything to say to me. I don’t think he spoke twenty words during our quadrille, for he was watching Mr Vane and Kitty.’

‘Well, well,’ says Mrs Bradford, with radiant face, ‘so long as both are pleased I’m content. Now don’t lie talking half the night, but get up early like good girls, for I want you both to-morrow to help with the raspberries.’

While this conversation is taking place at Trethill, Randal Carey, having seen the last of his guests depart, is sitting thinking. His hands are thrust into his

pockets, and his face wears a most discontented expression.

‘I can see that Mr Vane is struck with her,’ Randal says to himself; ‘he did nothing but talk to her the whole day, and I can’t think whatever it is makes me feel such a fool when I am near that girl. During the quadrille I mustered up courage to ask her to keep for me, I don’t think that we got through a dozen words, and I only managed to tear her frock, making her think me a greater lout than I am. I can find enough to say to Kitty, but not to her. If we are alone, I wonder if I am doing the right thing; the time passes, and at the end I have said nothing, and even done what I didn’t mean to.’

Randal was a fine young fellow of four-and-twenty, his fair face tanned into a brown that nearly matched his curly hair. If the face were really index to the heart, you would have judged Randal very truly. He was not particularly quick nor clever, but nature had formed him a gentleman of the old type—one who ‘loved his neighbour, feared God, and honoured the king.’ What a contrast to him was the man to whom he had just said ‘Good night,’—who had been everywhere, seen and done everything, and was ready to avow that

'there was nothing in it!' Nature had formed Arthur Vane particularly quick and clever, but the world made him a gentleman after its own fashion, who sneered at his neighbour (unless the neighbour provided money or amusement), who believed that God was only to be thought of and feared by women and sick people, who honoured nobody and nothing, and yet was not what is termed a bad man. On the contrary, people by general consent admired him. Even now our little Esty, instead of courting sleep, though her fair face rests upon the pillow, is setting Arthur Vane upon a pedestal in her heart, and will shortly fall down and worship him after the manner of her sex.

But he is not thinking one bit about her as he walks to his inn in the moonlight, puffing his cigar. No. His thoughts rather turn to Kitty, and run somewhat after this fashion—

'By Jove, I haven't seen anything so bewitching as that little Kitty Somebody for a month of Sundays. Now, that's a face and figure after my own heart, always reminding one of life and sunshine. I wonder what made me so extremely virtuous as to resolve to keep out of her way, and not interfere with the claims of that interesting bumpkin who was honouring



her with his bovine attentions. The sister is a pretty little thing, too. I believe the child thought I was smitten by her. She shows off Miss Kitty to perfection. I'll get Carey to go that way to-morrow—she told me their farm was not far from the Erme meadows—and then I think I'll "improve the shining hour." We never know until we try what may suit us, and evidently self-denial does not agree with me; so my advice is "*Bon homme garde ta vache.*"'

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## II.

NEXT day, as the sun was losing its power, Arthur Vane and Randal Carey crossed Warleigh Woods, and came upon what each man thought about the prettiest picture he had ever seen. Under the shade of the big walnut-tree, in her grey gown, starched white apron, and net cap, sat handsome Mrs Bradford, busy working. On the ground, with an immense yellow bowl of raspberries between them, sat Esty and Kitty, their spotless print dresses guarded by large white Holland aprons, their pretty fingers all stained red by the

fruit, which sent forth its delicious odour that no sense might remain ungratified. No sooner did they see their visitors than both their faces were as red as their fingertips. They did not mind Randal so much, but that the gentleman from London should see them thus! and they burst into laughter as the momentary vexation was driven away in the fun of being so caught. Arthur was the first to speak, and soon put them all at their ease. He had to be introduced to Mrs Bradford, and in five minutes he conveyed to her mind that to be introduced to her was the sole object of his visit. Kitty had insisted on Randal helping them to stem the raspberries, and Esty, though she did not look up, saw only Arthur Vane, heard only his voice. He must have made Randal come, indeed she heard Randal say as much to Kitty; but why did he want to come? It must have been—and here her heart beat so loud that she feared they would hear it, and she bent over the fruit that the joy might not be read in her tell-tale blushes.

Arthur, in the mean time, is making a discovery which piques him considerably, for he sees that Miss Kitty is not at all averse to Randal's attentions, and that as long as she can secure these attentions he may devote himself to her mother, or to

Esty, or to whom he pleases. 'Well,' he thinks, 'I generally contrive to win my way, and it will be odd if I owe my first defeat to two members of this rustic community. So, my charming Kitty, I shall continue to pay my most devoted attentions to your pale sister, and after she has sounded my praises in your ears, you will be all the more ready to appreciate my sudden surrender to your charms.' Thereupon Esty hears a soft voice asking if she will not allow herself to be helped, and, in imagination, Mrs Bradford has soon married both her daughters, and is debating in her own mind where Esty is to find a house to suit her near-by. Then she insists that they must stop to tea, and hurries off to get out the best china, to set forth all her delicacies, and to tell John to make himself fit to be seen.

When they all go under the tree again, John makes signs to Mrs Bradford to come and sit with him in the porch, and leave the young people to themselves for a time; but she will not understand, and the young men are obliged to take their leave without getting anything but a promise of a ramble in the woods.

As soon as John and his wife are alone, he says, 'Why, mother, I do believe our little Esty's got a sweetheart at last ;

and as for that Kitty, it's easy to see that Randal has neither eyes nor ears for anybody but her. Well, well! you know, Kate, I cut out his father, and so I'll make it up to the son by giving him my daughter. I seem to grow a boy again when I look at those two young chaps. They were both longing for a bit of a chat alone with the girls. Why didn't you leave them and come and sit by me?'

'Not I, indeed,' says Mrs Bradford. 'Better to leave longing than loathing. I'm not going to make my girls cheap to anybody.'

This day's ramble in the woods decided poor Esty's fate, and much disgusted Miss Kitty, who had quite made up her mind that when she and Randal were alone he would no longer spar and laugh, but become earnest and tender, while she—why, she would be cold and indifferent, and pretend she had never had an idea he meant them to be anything but friends. So she would drive him to despair, and then before they parted she would become shyly coy, and give him just enough hope to keep him in a fever until they met again. But instead of all this, he tried to keep close to Esty and Mr Vane, and when, at length, through her stopping for some ferns, they did lose the couple, Randal was

moodily silent, and walked by her side, switching off the heads of all the flowers, until she could have cried with vexation and wounded vanity. Indeed, she was only too glad to say 'Good-night' at the stile. Arthur noted the pouting expression, and was fain to think that Corydon and Philida had had a quarrel; for although under other circumstances it would have been very pleasant to have received such homage and worship as he read in Esty's soft eyes, still when he wanted the eagle the dove bored him.

He had divined rightly, that he should lose nothing in Esty's mouth; for now, as she sits brushing her golden hair, she repeats to Kitty all her hero's wonderful merits.

'And do you know,' she says, 'he can sing and play the piano and the guitar, and can speak French and Italian, and is so clever? But, for all that, I do not believe he is happy; he speaks as if he had no one to care for him.'

'Perhaps he's been crossed in love,' says Kitty, who is allowing Esty to have an unusual share of conversation just now.

'Oh, Kitty, impossible!'

'I don't see it's at all impossible. He is not good-looking, and he's much older than Randal.'

'Not good-looking! why, Kitty, you

surely have no taste. His eyes are lovely.'

'They may be, but they're poked into his head so far you can't see them.'

'Why, that gives them all their expression; and then he has such a good nose, and his moustache.'

'Oh, yes, I dare say he is perfection; but then as I'm not in love with him, and you are, you must not expect me to appreciate him quite so much.'

'Kitty, you shouldn't say that; it isn't nice.'

'Why not? I am sure he is dreadfully in love with you. Randal does nothing but ask if you don't care for him.' Before these words are fairly out, Esty has thrown her arms round her sister's neck, and Kitty says, 'Why, I do believe you are crying,' and Esty answers with a little sob, 'No, I am not, only—only—if he really does care for me—oh, Kitty!'

The moon peeps through the diamond panes to look upon this pretty scene, and throws her soft light on Randal and Arthur as they stand at Crayshaw gate. Arthur is in the highest possible spirits, for he has been sounding Randal about Kitty, and during the conversation, without seeming unduly interested, has found out that the love lies on Miss Kitty's side, and also—although Randal thinks he has most art-

fully guarded his secret—that Esty has a devoted lover of whom she wots not.

‘Well, Carey,’ says Arthur, ‘you know it’s hardly fair to Miss Kitty, to pay her so much attention if you mean nothing.’

‘Indeed,’ replies Randal, ‘you’re mistaken, for beyond laughing and talking she never gave me a thought. I don’t know how it is, we always seem to be thrown together; but if it causes remarks, I’ll manage to keep out of the way after this.’

‘There you’re wrong,’ answers Arthur; ‘I should break off the thing by degrees; it always makes it awkward for a girl when a man suddenly leaves off paying the attention he has been accustomed to show her. I should go there just the same as ever, but I should manage to pay less court to Miss Kitty, and more to her sister.’

‘What! *you* advise me to pay attention to Esty; I shouldn’t get a chance while *you* were by.’

‘*I!* why, I talk to her simply because I thought you wanted the fair Kitty all to yourself. Both are equally charming to me; but the poor little thing complained that you never cared to speak to her, and had no eyes for any one when her pretty sister was near.’

‘Esty said so!’ cries Randal; ‘she spoke about me!’

‘Yes,’ returns Arthur. ‘Perhaps it is not quite right in me, but I fear your good looks have been too much for both the sisters, and one is allowing concealment to “prey upon her damask cheek.” Now do you see the value of my attentions?’

‘Oh, Mr Vane,’ Randal exclaims, forgetting all his caution in his joy, ‘I am so much obliged! you don’t know what a kindness you have done me. I don’t mind telling you now, that I am awfully in love with Esty Bradford; but I could never show her what I felt because somehow she seemed so much above me. If she were only here now, I—I—could say anything.’

‘Well,’ laughs Arthur, ‘since I have been a friend to you, take my advice. Don’t be too rash, or the girl will naturally think you and her sister have had a quarrel. Let matters go on as they are at present, and you will see how soon all will run in the right groove.’

So, as the summer days went by, Kitty chafed under Randal’s changed manner, while gentle Esty, seeing all was not going on smoothly, became more talkative to Randal, sending Arthur to amuse Kitty. Randal found his awkwardness vanish before Esty’s unconscious familiarity; and



Arthur, partly through Kitty's charms, and partly because no girl before had ever remained so long indifferent to him, was unreasonably and completely consumed by a passion which he called love. 'By Jove,' he would say to himself, 'I must put an end to this; it's too bad to that poor child. She must be awfully far gone. When I see her colour coming and going, and her loving eyes shyly looking up to mine, for my life I can't help lowering my voice and looking back again; and then, when I feel her little hand trembling, I press it even while I am making up my mind I won't do so. Oh, Kitty! you have a great deal to answer for. It wouldn't considerably surprise me if some fine evening I made a fool of myself, for I believe I have four times packed up my traps in the morning and unpacked them in the evening, and no man can stand that wear and tear long.'

So, with the view of carrying out his virtuous intentions the next evening they meet, Arthur pays so little heed to Esty, that she thinks she must have offended him. Her heart feels very sore when, after he and Kitty have teased, and quarrelled, and laughed, they finally ramble off together, leaving her with Randal. Fancying he is sorry for her, she is very kind and gentle to him, only disturbing his

happiness by saying that she must go home, as her head aches so badly she can hardly talk. Then he bids her not speak again; and, as she leans upon his arm, he helps her through the tangled briar and brushwood, silently praying that he may be her 'staff to stay,' and she his 'star to guide,' through all their life to come.

Mrs Bradford is duly anxious about her daughter, and Esty kisses her mother, and tells her that she is not very bad, only she knows she shall not be better until she gets sleep, and she will go to bed as quickly and quietly as possible. And then Randal sits beneath the tree by Mrs Bradford, under pretence of waiting for Arthur, but really because he can see the diamond-paned window of Esty's room.

Now, from certain signs she had lately seen, sharp-sighted Mrs Bradford had felt a little uneasy, fearing that they were all playing a game of cross purposes. But this evening Randal's anxiety and looks of tender compassion have openly shown his feelings, and she begins to think that if she doesn't set her wits to work her scheme will be upset when it appears nearest completion. So, when Kitty has returned, and they are left alone, she begins—

'Why, Kitty, what's made you and Randal so chuff to each other lately? How

was it you and Mr Vane walked together? You've been showing off your airs to Randal, and he won't put up with it.'

'I'm sure, mother,' answers Kitty, with a toss of her head, 'I don't want him to put up with my airs, as you call them; I don't value his attentions.'

'Oh, I dare say not,' replies Mrs Bradford, quickly. 'The cow didn't know the value of her tail till she'd lost it; but perhaps when I tell you that he's quite given you up for your sister you'll wish you hadn't been quite so high and mighty.'

'Dear me!' says Kitty quite scornfully, but with a sharp thorn of jealousy at her heart. 'This is really too good; for Esty's lover is only waiting for me to hold up my finger, and he will come after me anywhere: and as she doesn't mind taking other people's orts, I don't see why I need be above following her example,' and as she said this, she thought bitterly, 'I'll not be pitied by Randal. He must have seen I cared for him, and all the while he has been liking Esty. I understand it all now, and I hate him.' Therefore, quite regardless of Esty, she resolves that Arthur shall propose to her, and that she will accept him, rather than let Randal suppose that she is breaking her heart about him.

Mrs Bradford was in the habit of deciding most things for her family, and by the next morning had made up her mind that Esty must go and spend a week with Aunt Matilda. Just then, the less she saw of Mr Vane the better; and by the time she returned, if he intended anything by Kitty, they would have settled matters, or he might go away as he had said he should do two or three times lately. Any way, he would most likely be disposed of, and the field left open to Randal.

‘Things in this world,’ she thought, ‘always turn as crooked as a ram’s horn; else why couldn’t Randal take to Kitty? She’s just the wife for him; and then Esty, I can see, has set her heart on Mr Vane. Poor little thing! I’m sure she should have him if I could have things as I want them. But there,’ she continued, as conscience began to give her little pricks, ‘I am doing all for her good, and Esty’s easily turned; so she won’t hold out against anybody long.’

It was therefore made known to every one that unless Esty immediately went to spend a week with Aunt Matilda, neither of the girls would ever be a farthing the better for the money she had to leave. Now, Aunt Matilda might drop off at any time, and what would folks say if her own

sister's children couldn't spare a few days to go and see her now and then? Esty was the favourite, and Esty must go first; and when she came back, Kitty should go. Esty showed more resistance to her mother than she had ever done before; and then when she found she must go, she pleaded hard to be allowed to stay till the next day; but it was all to no purpose. Mischief was wanted then to take father to Modbury; and eleven o'clock found Esty some five miles on her way towards Aunt Matilda's house. She could indulge her own thoughts, for Seth's conversation was purely laconic. He seldom spoke except to enlighten Esty with such remarks as 'Her's a heifer,' 'There's a bull,' and then he would relapse into silence.

Poor Esty! how grey everything looked to her! All the rose colour which had lately seemed to flood her young life had suddenly vanished—Arthur to be so altered all at once as never to look at her! She must have offended him, and now a whole week must pass, and she shouldn't know the cause. Perhaps that very day he would be sorry, and come to make it up, and find her gone. Oh, what could she do? Then there was Kitty quite cool and silent, and when she had asked what was the matter—had she vexed her in

anything? she got for reply, that nothing was the matter; how could Esty vex *her*? But then Kitty was often put out, and that was nothing to Arthur. Suppose he should think that she was angry, and had meant to leave without seeing him, and that he should go back to London! At this thought she clasps her little hands tightly together to still the feeling that impels her to jump out and run all the way to the 'Roebuck' and implore Arthur to forgive her.

Mrs Bradford had made a great mistake when she sent Esty to Aunt Matilda's that she might see less of Arthur Vane, and so think less of him. Had that been her only scheme, assuredly it would have failed, for in the dull house, with no one but her ailing aunt to speak to, the girl's whole thoughts were given up to him. Every one of his merits was magnified a hundred times by absence. If she walked out she sighed that he was not by her side. If she sat silent, she wondered where he was. I doubt if ever such earnest prayers had been offered for his happiness and protection as Esty sent up.

So at the end of the week Esty returned home, her heart filled with 'that bliss beyond all that the minstrel hath told.' She was received by her mother

and sister, who told her how much they had missed her, and how glad they were to see her; but no word was spoken of Randal or Arthur.

It is evening, and Esty, after she has unpacked her things and put them away in her drawers, begins to wonder why Kitty has not come up to her, for then she will hear all the news. She resolves to go down and find her, but first she readjusts her dress and hair, casting many a lingering look in the glass, for it is the time that Arthur generally comes, and he and Randal may walk over. She looks into the big kitchen, but there is no Kitty there, nor is she under the walnut-tree, nor anywhere about. She may be in the parlour, so Esty goes up the three low stairs, and along the little passage, and down another step into the best room—a room made but little use of at Trethill, and always reminding the inmates of good prosy books and somewhat dull Sunday afternoons. Esty is rather surprised to see in it so many signs of recent occupation. Kitty's work is lying there, as well as some half-wound wool and a book left open. But she cannot give more than a passing thought, for every beat of her heart seems to say, 'Will he come? will

he come?' and she seats herself on the old-fashioned window-seat, where she can just catch a glimpse of the pathway leading to the wooden stile. In five minutes the anxious question is changed into a pæan, for two figures cross the wood-path, and Esty's face is covered with a soft rosy colour that joy will hardly let die out again. She waits for a minute, and then runs to the door and listens. It is only Randal's voice, for Arthur has gone round by the garden; he wants to meet her alone. Oh, she is so glad to see him again! Now she does not feel one bit shy; she will tell him how sorry she was to go, and that she has done nothing but think of him, and that—yes, there he comes; he opens the gate so softly, and then it swings-to with a click as he impatiently strides forward. But to what?—to whom? To Kitty, who comes out of the little bower radiant with smiles, and on whose rosy face—while she feigns to push him away—Arthur prints a dozen kisses. Then he puts his arm round her, and they slowly go back to the little bower, while Randal, coming to seek Esty with his heart overflowing with a love he can no longer keep from her, sees the white face pressed against the window, its eyes dilated, and every feature sharpened



by the torture she endures from what she has seen. He sees her slip from her seat, and hide her head in the cushions as she sobs out, 'Oh, my heart will break.'

Then the truth dawns upon Randal, and with it a vague suspicion that Arthur has lied to him. His great unselfish love swallows up disappointment, and leaves only bitter agony that he can give no comfort to his darling, to secure whose happiness then he would willingly give up every hope of his own; but he is powerless, and has to go softly away and say he thinks Esty is out of doors, as he cannot find her. Perhaps she is in the wood, and he will go and look for her there.

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### III.

Two months have not cooled Arthur's passion for Kitty. He is more in love than he ever was before, and when he thinks of his mother's allowance to him of £200 a year being withdrawn, he consoles himself with the thought that Kitty has not been brought up a fine lady with a hundred wants. They must live abroad for a time, and then return to London and

take lodgings somewhere. Kitty won't know whether the place is fashionable or not. Of course, he must keep up his club and show himself there, and some day he may pick up an appointment.

Kitty is supremely happy. As a lover Arthur is all that any girl could wish; and she is delighted, too, at the prospect of going abroad, and living in London. But a shadow has fallen between her and Esty. The girls no longer feel at ease when left alone.

Mrs Bradford doesn't 'know what has come to the child.' But when she notices Esty's weary step and heavy eyes, or comes upon her unawares, as she sits with her hands supporting her chin, and her eyes gazing into vacancy, her heart is stung. Then Kitty complains that Esty disturbs her by moaning in her sleep, and so now they have separate rooms. Esty is always tired, and cannot be induced to ramble in the woods, though Randal often comes to ask her. But she is very sweet and gentle to him, thinking that in losing Kitty he has suffered too, and that this makes him silent and low-spirited.

Poor Randal! These are truly weary days for him. When he looks at Esty and thinks of the great sorrow that lies heavy at her heart, he feels as if he could

take her in his arms, that in the love and pity he feels towards her she might find rest and peace. There is but one hope for him. Perhaps when Kitty is married, and they are both gone, Esty may in time come to think less about Arthur, and bring herself to like him a little.

Esty's great trial draws nigh—the day that will forbid her to think of Arthur more. It is now the night before the wedding, and the sorrow which up till this time has lain dull and heavy now blazes forth, phoenix-like. The poor little head droops low, as between her sobs she prays that she may be able to wish happiness to Kitty, her dear sister, who is so pretty that it is no wonder she made Arthur love her. But, oh, had it only been any one but Kitty, she could have borne it better. Then she need never have seen him again—she would not have felt so oppressed, so overwhelmed with wickedness and shame. She cannot drive the man who is to be her sister's husband from her heart. But to-morrow she shall see them married, and after that she will never think of him again.

All the day of the wedding Esty seems to herself as one in a dream. When she stands by Kitty's side she is surprised how little of the agony she has so much

dreaded possesses her heart. Her thoughts wander off to things she has never heeded before. She wonders who has planted the ivy, a spray of which comes in at the window? Whether Roger Consandine and Audrey his wife were like those two small fat figures kneeling opposite each other.

Kitty would have liked a gay wedding, but Arthur had told her that he could never stand relations, and impressed upon her the delight he would feel in having nobody to interfere with their happiness on that day; and as the church was half way to the station, it would be best to leave without returning to Trethill.

Mrs Bradford at first opposed this violently. But Arthur generally contrived to get his own way, and it was decided according to his wishes. So about half an hour after the wedding, Mr and Mrs Bradford, Randal, and Esty are standing at the little station, waiting for the up train which will take Kitty away. Amid the confusion and the stir of 'good-byes,' Mrs Bradford tries hard to keep in the tears, while they roll down John's cheeks, and Esty looks pale and white. But the whistle shrieks, and she and Kitty kiss each other. Randal catches quick hold of Esty, for the train is in motion; another

moment, and the newly-wedded pair are gone.

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#### IV.

MR and Mrs Bradford, Randal, and Esty silently return to the old farm. Mrs Bradford says, 'Talk about weddings! there's only a pin to choose between them and funerals.' John takes Esty beside him, and tells her that she must bide at home with father and mother for a good bit yet; and Esty protests she has no thought of leaving. Nor has she. When she thinks of herself now, it is without hope for the future. She tries to be cheerful, but joy will not come without an effort. When she goes to church she looks at Miss Cordelia, the Squire's sister, who, her mother says, was a great beauty, only she has had a disappointment. Now she is a sharp-faced, cross old lady, the terror of children and young house-wives. She wonders if she will ever come to that, and a little shudder steals over her.

She will go on thus quietly existing for some weeks, when some morning a letter comes from the bride with, 'We are at Vevay,' and 'How I wish you were at

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Interlaken!' and at this the restless feeling comes back again.

The snow is on the ground, yet Randal crosses Warleigh Woods as frequently as when he had to hold back the wild roses, and pick his way through celandine, wood-sorrel, and veronica. He has confided his trouble to Mrs Bradford, and she has promised to sound Esty on her feelings towards him. The matron knows she has undertaken a task requiring much tact and diplomacy; and though she always tells Randal to have patience, that 'no oak was ever felled with one stroke,' yet she is not at all so sure of turning Esty round as in days gone by.

'Why, Esty,' she begins, as they sit together in the old kitchen, 'you've been looking at that coal for more than five minutes. What are you thinking of, child?'

'Me? Oh, nothing, mother.'

'Thinking of nothing is poor work,' says the mother. 'I was thinking of our Kitty. I don't like her feeling so fretty in that outlandish place.'

'But she is in Brussels now, mother, and if she does not feel stronger, they will come back, I should think, as Kitty seems to long for home; yet she must have enjoyed all she has seen. How I should like to see Switzerland!'

‘ Well,’ answers her mother, ‘ I dare say you will see it some of these days.’

Here Esty gives a little deprecatory smile, and her mother continues, ‘ When you get married you must go to all the places Kitty has been to. I know somebody who would be only too proud and pleased to take you.’

‘ Pleased to take me, mother! whom do you mean?’

‘ Well, Esty, my dear, they say “ love is blind,” and sometimes people are blind to love, else you’d see that Randal is getting thin and pale, all because you don’t seem to understand what he is always coming here for.’

‘ Understand, mother! why, what can you mean?’ says Esty, with a scared look. ‘ I know that Randal has never been the same since Kitty left us; he often hints at the pain he has suffered, poor fellow.’

‘ Yes, Esty, but everybody but you knows who is the cause of his pain. Now, now let me speak out—Randal always loved you, only he thought that you were so above him, that when he came near you he seemed as if struck dumb. Arthur Vane was the first who advised him to pluck up courage, and wait his time, and in the end he would win you. Nay, child, don’t cry so; I can tell your feelings; you

think you never want to be married. But, Esty, I cannot bear to think of you, when father and me are gone—lonely—old—perhaps unloved. “The sweetest wine makes the sharpest vinegar,” and many a crabbed old maid was once as sweet and young as yourself. And Randal is a man to be proud of—so kind and gentle, even hiding his love for fear it should pain you. So, for father’s sake and for mine, think over what I have said; and if you feel that he is not quite your choice, yet think what happiness you will give to us all.’

At this Esty hides her face in her mother’s lap, saying, ‘Oh, mother! mother! To make you and father happy I will do anything you wish.’

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## V.

THE June sun is again declining on the old farmhouse at Trethill, lighting up the patches of yellow moss on the roof, glancing along the diamond panes in the old-fashioned windows, slanting through the leaves on the big walnut-tree, and lingering fondly and softly on the very same group which two years ago had charmed the eyes



of Randal Carey and Arthur Vane. There is Mrs Bradford, handsome as then, but with many a silver streak in her dark hair, and lines about her mouth and eyes that we should not have seen before. Her knitting lies idly on her lap, and her eyes are closed as if to keep from view some sight which pains them. On the ground sits pale-faced Esty, her hair every now and again turning to brightest gold as it catches the sun's warm rays, for she bends over a reclining figure, and sways gently to and fro, fanning—Kitty? But, no!—surely that face with the big, wistful eyes and hectic flush can never be that of Kitty Bradford? Ah! but it is, although Katherine Vane is a very different person from our vain, self-loving, warm-hearted Kitty, who had, as Arthur said, 'a face and figure after his own heart, and which would always remind him of life and sunshine.' What had life, what had sunshine to do with the frail creature who seems but kept from the grasp of the 'dread monarch' by the loving hands which will not let her go from them? Kitty has come home to die; but the hardest thing of all is this—that Kitty can say, life has been harder than death could be. For the first three months after marriage she had been Arthur's toy, his pet, his pleasure; but soon she had to

battle against neglect, jealousy, and wrong, until at length a time came when she succumbed, and only begged to be sent back to her mother and Esty. As her husband had been asked to make one of a fishing party to Norway, he gave his consent. Now the only fear in the hearts of Mrs Bradford and Esty is, that Arthur and Kitty will never see each other again in this world.

‘Hark,’ says the faint voice, ‘I hear Randal coming across the footpath;’ and then, with her old smile to Esty, ‘you ought to hear his step first; love should be blind, but not deaf.’ And Randal comes behind Esty, and bends over to show the tempting strawberries he has brought.

‘How good you are to me!’ says Kitty; ‘what should we do without him, Esty?’

Esty’s little hand at this slides into Randal’s, her face upturned to his, full of contented love. They were to have been married some time ago, but Kitty cannot spare her sister, and they know that she will not hinder them long.

As soon as she can do so, Esty joins Randal, to be told by him that Arthur has sent a telegram, saying that he is on his

road to Trethill. Then Kitty has to be carried into the house, and the news gently broken to her.

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Arthur would sacrifice all to save her now, but Kitty is content to die, knowing that could a miracle raise her to health, six months hence the same old scenes would be enacted over again.

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A new year has come, and on the first Sunday in it, Esty Carey leaves her husband's arm to put her hand into her mother's; for they stand before a little cross with this inscription, 'Sacred to the memory of Katherine, the beloved wife of Arthur Vane, Esq., and daughter of John Bradford, of Trethill in this county,' and underneath are the words, 'It is better, if the will of God be so.'

Esty points to the text, and says, 'We can say so, mother, can we not?'

And Randal, taking the dear hand in his, thanks God that He has given such a treasure into his keeping.

'Come, mother,' says John, 'you know you always say it's folly fretting where grief's no comfort; let us turn homeward,

thankful that for both our children our hearts are at peace. While we live our Esty will be the pride and joy of her old father and mother ; and when we go hence, our Kitty with outstretched arms will welcome us there.'

## 'A WILL OF HER OWN.'

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'**H**URRAH! hurrah! Good news, mother. George has won; he made a capital speech, and everybody says he'll make his fortune at the Bar. Mr Luxmore *is* a jolly old fellow, and is pleased with George, and no mistake; here he comes.'

And the speaker, Jack Esdaile, rushes to open the door and precede his brother, blowing an imaginary trumpet solo of 'See the Conquering Hero comes.' Mrs Esdaile's sweet face lights up; and, as George enters the room, she goes quickly up to him, puts her arms round him, and says softly—

'My boy;' then, looking into his face, while her eyes are dimmed with happy tears, says, 'How proud your dear father will be!'

'And you—are you not proud of me, mother?'

'I, George?'

Her son wants no other answer, and, stooping to kiss her, feels more than repaid for weary nights of study and days full of thought and anxiety.

For this success was more to George Esdaile than it would have been to most young men entering on life. George could remember when his father was a merchant with no cares or fears, everything seemed so prosperous. Their old-fashioned country house with its big garden, where, when he came from Rugby, he spent such delightful holidays, still seemed home to him. He could recall the bank failure, and the harassing year that followed, when his father was so wretched and gloomy, and his mother never before so cheerful and sweet; and then the crash, and the dreadful time that followed, when Robert Esdaile found himself penniless with a wife and five boys to provide for. Ah! they had known many trials since then, trials which must have only been blessings in disguise, since each one left the husband and wife dearer to each other, and showed them fresh traits in their boys' characters to be proud of, and gave them renewed love and sympathy for all in sickness or sorrow.

It is ten years since their worldly wealth took wing. Robert Esdaile is now a City clerk, delighted when he gets a rise of £10 a year to his salary. All the boys, except Jack, are started in the world. Dick is in a merchant's office at Liverpool, and doing well; Hal *would* be a sailor, and writes delightful letters from Hong Kong; Fred is in the India House; and George, who had been taken by Mr Luxmore, the family solicitor, and given his articles, had always sighed for the Bar and is now 'called.' His kind old friend who had assisted him, and given him his first brief, is now chuckling with delight that he should have introduced such a promising young fellow. So this has been a very fortunate year for the Esdailes, and Fortune seems to be smiling upon them again. Yet, in spite of all this, father, mother, and boys all declare that it is the dullest year they have ever spent; the sunbeam of the house has gone, and all agree with Jack, that 'things ain't a bit the same without Nell.'

But who is Nell, and why is she not there, and where is she gone? Well, in years past, had you asked one of the Esdaile boys who Nell was, they would have told you that she was their sister. But lately somehow they had always said to

such a question, 'Miss Hall, who is just like a daughter to our mother.' And that was true, for from Mrs Esdaile, or auntie, as Nelly called her, the girl had all a mother's love, and that love was now going through a sharp trial. Mrs Esdaile and Nelly's mother had been playfellows, schoolfellows, and ever after dear friends. Against the wish of her family, Eleanor Davidson had married Captain Hall. He had fallen in the Crimean war, and his wife had ceased to regret that she was following him so fast after Mrs Esdaile had promised to bring up Nelly as her own child. 'She shall never forget you, Eleanor; but she shall never feel the want of your love, if I can help it.' This promise was made when the Esdailes had money and position. But when the promise had to be fulfilled, Nelly was received into a family where when one meal was finished they often knew not how the next would be provided. Nelly was ten years old when her mother died, just old enough, poor child, to realise her great loss and to appreciate the reception she met with from Mrs Esdaile, who took her in her arms while the little one proclaimed the tie that bound them:—'You loved mamma; you loved mamma.' Tears and caresses soothed her, the boys devoted



themselves to her entirely, and Mr Esdaile often said she had been sent to them to take their minds off their own troubles, 'and to show me, my dear, not to despond while I have you and the boys left.'

So Mrs Esdaile darned and mended for Nelly and the boys; and one taught Nelly this, and the other taught her that, until times got better and she could be put to school. Then little sacrifices were made that Nelly might have all the advantages they could obtain for her; and she repaid them by growing up the prettiest, and sweetest, and most loving girl in the whole neighbourhood. Jack declared that the whole of his form at school were in love with her, and that since she had been seen with Fred two or three times, several swells from his office had done nothing but walk up and down their street.

'Well, you needn't snap a fellow up like that, George,' said Fred to one of George's serious rebukes, 'for I should like to know who you think Robert Luxmore comes here to see. Not you, I'm certain.'

George knew that well enough, as well as he knew that pretty Nelly had taken all his love, and that, unless she could love him in return, life would be very dreary to him. Lately it had entered his mind that

she cared more for Fred; she would propose to walk out with him, and put her arm round his neck. Such things she never did to George; and if they did go out, they were nearly silent all the way. She didn't run down and open the door for him now as she once did. Stupid fellow, not to read the signs of the tender passion better than that. Why, Nelly had lost her heart long ago, only the poor little maiden had set her hero up so high, that she thought she must worship him afar off. Of course, George couldn't talk to her when they were alone, she wasn't clever enough for that. So she carries off some numbers of the *Solicitor's Journal*, and tries to get up a case or two for conversation, but, not being clear in her memory as to which is the plaintiff, and which is the defendant, that scheme fails signally, and Nelly declares to herself that she is more stupid than ever. Every evening at six finds her standing on tip-toe, looking over the blind in her little room, wondering why George does not come, a thousand fears making her foolish little heart beat. But, at last, she sees him coming. Instead, however, of flying to meet him, a sudden shyness comes over Miss Nell; and when she walks into the sitting-room, it is to say, 'What, is George home? is it so late? How

quickly the time flies!' Afterwards she goes up, and cries to think that he never looked at her, and hardly spoke to her. Mrs Esdaile, who is as young at heart as either of them, and thoroughly enters into every true love affair, is sometimes quite vexed. For George is his mother's darling, and Nelly is the wife she has chosen for him. She knows all her sons are in love with the child, after a fashion, down to Jack, who often prefaces a speech with, 'When you and I are married, Nell.' But the mother sees that Nelly has only caught the fancies of the other boys, while George has staked his entire happiness on her Yes or No.

Matters were still in this condition, when one day Mrs Esdaile received a visit from a distant cousin of Nelly's mother. He had just returned from India, and had found that Mrs Hall was dead, and that none of her relatives had considered themselves near enough to feel it their duty to look after her orphan child, who they said had been adopted by a family called Esdaile. The Esdailes were not so well off as in former days, but lately (meaning for ten years or so) they had lost sight of them. Mr Davidson made no secret of his interest in Nelly.

'I loved her mother, Mrs Esdaile; and

if the daughter is anything like her, I intend to make her my heiress, and you will spare her, no doubt.'

'Spare her!' said Mrs Esdaile. 'What do you mean?'

'Mean, madam? Why, that you have a husband and five boys, and I am a childless old man, who hasn't got a wife, and doesn't want one; but he does want the girl to whom he intends to leave his money to live with him, and make him feel a little less friendless in his native land.'

Poor Mrs Esdaile! she hardly knew what to do, but she said she would consult her husband and Nelly, and call Nelly in that Mr Davidson might see her. He expressed himself perfectly satisfied with her, and said she was a modest-spoken, well-mannered young lady. And when he was gone, the young lady, who knew nothing of him save that he was a friend of Mrs Esdaile's, gave it as her opinion that he was a cross, ill-tempered old Scotchman. Mr and Mrs Esdaile had a long consultation that evening, a consultation in which love and what they considered duty waged very sharp warfare. But at last it was agreed that George should be called in, for by this time a letter had arrived from Mr Davidson, explaining what he intended to do for Miss Eleanor Hall, and making

only one very hard condition—that for one year, except in a case of illness, she should neither hear from nor see any of the Esdaile's. She was then to make her choice; and after that time he hoped they would ever continue on the most friendly terms. Poor George! his heart sank down like lead when he heard what his father had to say, but he only tried to swallow the great knot which rose in his throat, and to get out in a harsh voice—

'Of course, she must go; it would not be fair of us to keep her, or to influence her in any way.'

'George,' said Mrs Esdaile, 'I did not expect you to say such a thing as that; I am sure it would break Nelly's heart to go away from us.'

'Well, mother, she need not leave us if she chooses to return in twelve months.'

'Chooses, indeed,' replied his mother; 'I am surprised at your wanting to make out that Nelly is heartless; I thought you would have felt the very idea of her going more than any of us.'

'So I do, mother; and perhaps that very feeling urges me to say that—that,' and here the speaker's heart rebelled so violently that he suddenly stopped. In a moment his mother's arms were round his neck with as soft caressing as though he

had been a child again, and after a minute or two she said—

‘Now I shall leave you and papa to settle it with your heads, and I shall carry your hearts away, not to be returned until you have decided how it is right for us to act.’

And when she came back an hour afterwards it was to find George looking very pale, and his father very grave. When they were alone, Mr Esdaile said—

‘Mary, my dear, we must thank God that our boy has such a noble heart. My decision has been greatly influenced by his suggestions. Nelly must go, and George will trust that she will decide to return to us. Until then he will trust and hope. He tells me he had determined to get our consent to having his fate decided at once, but under existing circumstances it would neither be fair to Nelly nor to Mr Davidson.’

So, some days after, Nelly was told of the offer that had been made to her. The poor girl cried, and sobbed, and declared that she would not go. Then she flung herself into Mrs Esdaile’s arms, and asked her if she could part with her—if she could break her heart? And, with many tears, Mrs Esdaile told her that it was only for a year, that they had nothing to leave her,

and that in after life a regret *might* spring up in her heart because she had not made the trial. But all to no purpose. Nelly would not listen ; she did not want money, she never should, and she should die before the year was out living with that ugly, ill-tempered old man.

'Nay; Nelly dear, he only looks cross. In years gone by he seemed so much older than your dear mother, that I took little notice of him ; but I remember she always said that he had a good heart ; and I must say that his remembering her so faithfully and finding out her child, makes it look as if her opinion was correct. I am sure it is a bitter trial to us to part with our darling, though I know she will come back. Still I suppose it is our duty to let you go ; at least, George thinks so.'

At these words Nelly springs up from where she has been pillowing her pretty head, and, with flushed face and trembling voice, says—

'What did you say, auntie? George says I ought to go ; then, of course, I had better do so ; if every one thinks it is right, it is foolish in me to oppose them.' And before Mrs Esdaile can answer her she runs out of the room to fling herself on her own little bed, and cry, and moan, and feel more miserable than she ever did before.

Then George did not care for her; he could say that it was best that she should go; he could think that she might prize this horrid old man's money more than their love. 'Oh, George, how could you?' sobs the poor child. Nelly knew nothing of a love great in its calm strength, feeling its over-mastering power, and fearing lest that power should make it selfish and exacting towards its object. Nelly's sharp pain was not so bad to bear as the dull, heavy load George carried about with him—a burden which he knew he must carry, but which was none the lighter on that account. But our little Nell had a good spirit, and, acting up to what she thought right and proper, she bathed her eyes and smoothed her hair, and determined that George should not see how sore the trial was to her. So she described Mr Davidson to Jack, and tried to mimic the way in which he said that she was a 'varra modest-spoken, weel-mannered young led-die.' She declared she should soon talk in the same way, and held imaginary dialogues with Jack until Mrs Esdaile declared that she would be ill, so excited was she. George, amid all this, looked on bitterly, and wondered whether women had much feeling after all. This continued all the time Nelly remained; and although Mr



and Mrs Esdaile often spoke of her fits of tears and depression, and Fred and Jack bewailed the hard decision, and were loud in their hatred of Mr Davidson, George was silent, and seemed almost to avoid her. He was little at home, and had never once said that he was sorry she was going.

All these things were going on just as the New Year was setting in, for Mr Davidson had made his first appearance the day after Christmas Day, and by that day week Nelly's fate was decided. She and Mr and Mrs Esdaile were to start for Cheltenham, where Mr Davidson was, on the 5th of January.

'Then,' said Jack, in a very doleful voice, 'won't you be back by next Christmas Day, Nell? Oh, I say this is too bad; we shan't have any fun. What's the good of a plum-pudding unless you are here to stone the raisins, and stir it, and put up the holly and all the rest of it? Oh, Nell, promise you'll come back by Christmas Day. I'm sure old Davidson will have had enough of you by that time.'

'That I am sure he will,' answered tearful Nelly; 'and I promise you, Jack, that I will return and eat my Christmas dinner at home;' and then, at the thought of the many dinners to be eaten away from home, poor Nelly breaks down again.

You see she was not like a fashionable young lady, accustomed to go visiting. Had she been so, this separation would have been nothing, but all the years she had lived with the Esdailes Nelly had never once been away from them for a night, and now to go entirely among strangers, and not see or hear of her own dear ones, seemed terrible indeed.

It was a very busy time. Mr Davidson had given Mrs Esdaile a cheque, which she was to fill in, saying the money was to be spent in getting everything suitable for a young lady. And now one parcel arrived and now another; then the dresses came home, and must be tried on; and Mrs Esdaile and Nelly forgot they had to part in the excitement of a violet silk, or their satisfaction at having chosen the black velveteen. Then the seal-skin hat was so becoming, that papa says they must give her a kiss all round. At this Fred goes down on his knees, and gives her a most chivalrous salute; and Jack, declaring she looks scrumptious, makes a dash at her that nearly knocks the hat off; and then Nelly stands before George, and a sudden shyness makes her get red, and say, 'I must put up my hair; I do believe Jack has pulled it down.' And before she has time to look up or say more,

George has risen and is going out of the room, and Nelly could cry with vexation that she had ever gone near him. She runs up-stairs, and George comes back angry with himself that he should have shown such ill-temper, and be jealous because she lingered with the others, and seemed reluctant to come to him.

At last Thursday morning comes, and the boxes are packed, and the good-byes to her few friends said, and all her last requests uttered—to look after her cat and feed the bird, and give him a nice bit of sugar every morning, and to be sure to attend to a myrtle, which it is thought may bloom next year.

The house is in a state of great excitement, Mrs Esdaile seeming to think Martha quite incapable, and indulging many fears that the dear boys will not have anything comfortable to eat until she returns. Mr Esdaile walks through every room in the house, at intervals of five minutes, to be quite certain that they have left nothing behind them. Then he opens the door and looks down the street, shuts it, consults his watch, and hopes that the cabman does not intend to be late. George had said in the morning that he should return in the middle of the day, and see them again, but there is no sign of him yet; and

Mrs Esdaile hopes Mr Luxmore won't be inconsistent enough to detain him; she wouldn't feel quite comfortable at going, for she never bade him good-bye this morning.

Mr Esdaile laughingly declares that one would imagine they were going to the coast of Africa, there is such a fuss, but still he keeps looking in the direction George would come, and calls out in a delighted voice, 'All right, my dear, here he comes, just in time, too.' Then up comes the cab, and the bustle increases; and in the midst of it, Nelly goes into the boys' den, where she finds George looking for some twine, and thinks she will say good-bye at once. So she begins in a very shaky voice,

'Good-bye, George, and I hope you will soon be a barrister, and thank you for having been so kind to me;' and here the poor little thing fairly broke down, and sobbed out, 'Oh, don't forget me. Let me always be your—'

I wonder what she wanted always to be? Nelly never said it, and George never heard it; for, forgetting all but that she was really going away, he had caught her in his arms, and was covering her fair face with kisses. True, the only words he spoke was when he put her from him, and then he only echoed her own,

'Forget you, Nelly!'

Here Martha rushed in with, 'Oh, Miss, master's calling for you everywhere; he says he knows you'll be too late.'

And Nelly runs down, her heart lighter than her feet, catches up her cat, and squeezes the breath nearly out of its body, grips hold of Martha's hand, and wrings it with 'Good-bye, dear old Martha, dear old house, dear old street, dear everybody, until Christmas, when I shall see you again.'

Then, as they drive off, she bursts into a great flood of tears, tears that seem to wash away every cloud from her heart, and form a bright rainbow, promising nothing but happiness. For Nelly's heart is young and elastic, and all doubt is gone, fear has vanished; George loves her, and what can harm her? She never thinks about him and his uncertainty whether his love is returned; indeed, I believe, had such a thought been suggested to her, she would have been almost indignant at the idea that George could bestow such a gift on any one, and it not be received and heartily responded to. Ah! our little Nelly prized the gift too highly, had mounted her hero on too lofty a pedestal, to have any doubt but that he should know when he, her king, held out the

sceptre, the queen of his heart would greatly rejoice. So to Mr and Mrs Esdaile Nelly was a mystery. That she should have so violently opposed going, and up to the very last moment bemoaned her fate, weeping over everything because it was the last time she should do it, and speaking of her return almost as if it was a thing she had a presentiment would never take place, and then suddenly all her energy comes back again—was what they could not account for. When they reach Mr Davidson, at Cheltenham, she speaks to him so nicely, and says quite what they would have wished. It is at their desire, she says, that she has accepted his offer, but though she feels very, very grateful, she knows she shall choose to return to those who are dearer to her than the world.

'May be, my dear,' said the old gentleman, 'dearer than the world is now, but, as you have seen very little of it yet, you are no fair judge.'

It was a sad parting with Mrs Esdaile; but most of the soothing now came from Nelly.

'Don't cry, auntie dear; if you are ill I am to come to you, and if I am ill you are to come to me; and a year will soon pass away. Wherever I am, I shall al-

ways be thinking of you and dear papa, and Fred, and Jack, and—and—George; and I feel God will spare us all until Christmas day, when we shall meet again.'

Mrs Esdaile would not confess it even to herself, but a voice within would worry her by asking if it was not natural for a young girl to be carried away by having a handsome house and carriage, and fine clothes; and although Mr Davidson was very silent, and stern, and cynical, he was evidently resolved on trying to unbend to Nelly. Would he succeed, and would she give them up? If so, 'my poor boy'—and Nelly is forgotten in sympathy for George.

Three months passed, and then came a letter from Mr Davidson, saying that he thought it right to inform Mrs Esdaile that he and Miss Eleanor Hall were about to leave England for a continental tour, but in case of any urgency for writing, a letter addressed to the care of his agents in the Rue de Richelieu would be forwarded with all despatch. Miss Hall was quite well, and would, doubtless, have sent some message did she know he was writing, but she was at that moment out making some purchases. The letter was dated from Claridge's Hotel, and was as stiff and formal as the writer. That letter somehow

seemed to build up such a wall between them and Nelly—that she should be in London—close to them, perhaps, and they never see her; it was hard, indeed; and now the sea would be between them. Fred and Jack were loud in declaring that they did not believe she would ever return. Mrs Esdaile, though she stoutly held that Nelly would never change, looked anxiously at George, who, between anxiety and study, began to have a worn look and an irritable manner, that told his mother how ill his heart was at ease.

And Nelly; is she pining and sighing, and still bemoaning her fate? No, indeed. The little puss is thoroughly enjoying everything; making herself look distracting in the most bewitching of Parisian costumes, accepting all the attention bestowed very freely on Mr Davidson's heiress by Mr Davidson's friends and acquaintances, driving in the Champs Elysées in the afternoon, and carrying off the silent, grave old man to some place of entertainment in the evening. She is enjoying her six weeks' visit to Paris so completely, that he often looks at her and shakes his head, muttering, 'All alike—no heart, no heart.'

But when the day is done, and the fine clothes taken off, and the maid dismissed,



he cannot hear the prayers our little Nelly utters for the safety and protection of her loved ones—the blessings she asks for them. The chief worldly prayer for herself is that they may be spared to meet and love each other, and never part again. Then their photographs are looked at and kissed, and bidden good night. Only two are kept in her hand, and on them she pillows her fair cheek, and sinks off to sleep as sweetly as a child who holds his greatest treasure in his grasp.

So there is not much fear for Nelly, she can enjoy Paris and Switzerland, as it is only natural she should. But half her interest is to think what a lot she will have to tell them all; and she keeps a diary, that she may be quite certain as to where she saw the picture of St Peter crucified with his head downwards; and where the bow is that William Tell used in shooting the apple from his son's head; and to make particular notes about Zurich, because auntie's favourite song among the boys was 'By the margin of fair Zurich's waters.' In all she sees and does the tide of love turns homeward, and ever drifts her thoughts thither; but she is very silent about them, for Mr Davidson, though kind in action, is somewhat sharp in speech. He indulges in rather caustic

remarks on the fair sex, and makes little sneering comments on their aptitude for domestic love and happiness, illustrating these remarks by pointing to some of the specimens they meet at the hotels, whose only aim in life, he says, is amusement, dress, and attracting notice. So Nelly tightly closes up her sweet warm feelings and impulses, lest Mr Davidson should sneer at them also, and turn them into ridicule.

On the very day on which George made his maiden speech Nelly is at Ouchy, and circumstances combine to make them both think especially of each other. George, in the hour of success, naturally turns to her, with whom he wishes to share every joy and sorrow, and is led to think how much more triumphant he would have felt could he have seen her bright eyes dancing with delight and beaming with love for him. And then a thought creeps in—suppose you should never have her to cheer your life, what would life be? And such a sharp pain comes into the brave young heart, that he is fain to ask God's help to bear it. Suspense seemed so hard to him. If he could but have told her all she was to him—how she sat enthroned in the life of his heart and love; then he felt she would—she must come back, for since

their parting George had been much more confident about Nelly's returning his devotion. Could he have asked her then, he was sure she would not have said No; but would she stand the test of the world, and be true to him in spite of the admiration she was sure to receive from men so much more able to charm a girl's fancy than he was? Yes, for Nelly sits and looks out of her window on Geneva's Lake, and in her hand she holds a letter containing her first offer—an offer to give her all that the most worldly woman could desire, and only asking her love in return. And foolish little Nelly is positively crying, and saying, 'I must have acted wrongly to make him think I could ever care for him. I suppose it was through my laughing and talking too much; but it seemed so nice to have somebody to remind one of the dear ones at home—somebody to whom I could say the first foolish thing that came into my head, and who did not look sneeringly at everything like "that grumpy Mr Davidson," though I am sure he is very kind. Oh, how I wish Mr Crawford had not done this! What shall I say to him? I am so sorry for him, and I feel as if I had done something wrong to George.'

And while she sat, sometimes carried

away by a grand castle-building, and sometimes thinking over the refusal she should write to Mr Crawford, there came a knock at the door, and Mr Davidson himself entered with a letter in his hand, which Nelly saw was also from her admirer. When he explained its contents the poor girl was more covered with confusion than ever. What would he think of her—he who did not seem to believe that women were born for anything beyond dressing themselves and wasting their time—whose panacea for their sorrows and disappointments was 'Take them out shopping?' Oh, she could not breathe the word love to him. So she told him, in as few words as possible, that she was very sorry for Mr Crawford, who had always been so kind to her; but she hoped he would think no more of her, for she was quite sure she should never like anybody they met. And here the tears began to fall afresh. It was just as she thought; the hard-hearted, horrid old man quite chuckled, rubbed his hands, and took more snuff than she had ever seen him take before. For days after Nelly often found him with his eyes fixed upon her, and then he would turn away with a positive grin on his hard, old, brown face. Before September was out they were in Scotland, and while there Nelly began

quite to like her grim old companion. He could not let her be ignorant of the stories of his native land, and when, with all the eloquence which true love of country gives to the rudest tongue, he described some desperate fray, or told some touching story of love and chivalry, Nelly wondered what made him at other times so cynical, morose, and gloomy, putting himself into fits of passion for the most trivial thing, and frightening people by the way he roared at them if they presumed to contradict him.

Nelly had ceased counting the months, and was now beginning to count the weeks to Christmas, when she should return home. She wondered if they would think her altered, and took out her old photograph, and looked at it. Then she ran to the glass, and had a good survey of her personal appearance. She really believed she was improved; perhaps it was that her dresses were better made, and her hair better done up. Of course, she would have to go back to contriving her own clothes, as she and auntie used to do; and she had learnt so many things from her maid that auntie would be quite astonished at her improvement.

Day after day she waited, hoping that Mr Davidson would open the conversation as to her decision. They were now back

at Cheltenham, and it wanted but a week to Christmas Day; and, finding that he was still silent, she determined one morning to broach the subject. So, with much fear, trembling, and with rather a guilty feeling, she went down into his morning-room. There he sat, engaged in reading, his spare, thin figure resembling a cross-peg on which to hang his loose overcoat. He never once looked up even to see who had entered. This was not promising, so Nelly thought she would lead up to what she had to say by a little general conversation. She looked out of the window, and said, 'I think the weather is to be fine.' But this drew no notice. Perhaps he didn't hear me, Nelly thought, for she had noticed that sometimes he was a little deaf, and would desire you to repeat your remark in a way that invariably made you feel that you had said the most silly thing in the world. However, Nell had determined to have her say, so she returned to the charge.

'It's a very fine morning.'

'Is it?' answered her companion.

Now this was too bad. Nelly left the window, and, with a desperate feeling, stood at the end of the table, and suddenly came out with—

'Oh, Mr Davidson, if you please, next

Thursday is Christmas Day, and I want, that is, I wish to be very much obliged to you for all your kindness, but I would rather go home.'

For a moment she wondered if he had heard her, for he waited, and apparently finished the sentence he was reading, took up a paper-knife, and marked the place, slowly lifted his rheumatic leg off its rest, and then sat bolt upright, and looked at her, saying—

'May I trouble you to repeat your remark to me again?'

This time Nell's face got very red, but she once more out with her decision bravely.

'I said next Thursday is Christmas Day, and I wish to return home, if you please.'

'Oh, twelve months in the world hasn't cured you, then? You're still a fool,' he replied.

'A fool!' said Nelly. 'I don't know what you mean, sir.'

'Then I'll tell you what I mean, Miss Eleanor. You're an orphan and penniless, and if you return to your home, as you call it, you will be dependent, and dependent too upon people who have to make a struggle for their own living, while I, holding the most distant tie of blood as a claim, offer you a home and everything you can

want while I live, and when I am dead you'll find yourself mistress of a handsome fortune. But if you choose rather to return and live with this Quixotic family in their poverty-stricken house, and deprive them of the few comforts their poor income can allow them, why, all I say is, go, but don't look for a farthing from me, for you won't have it.'

'And I don't want it,' said Nelly, all ablaze with indignation. 'I never wanted your money, nor wished to come here at all, only Mr Esdaile said it was not fair to myself to give up a thing I was not then in a position to value. I told you from the first that I should choose to go home. Yes, sir, you may sneer, but it is my home, and I am not dependent. God has put such love into our hearts that though I know I owe everything I possess to them, I would not have it otherwise though I could. Do you think they ever felt the sacrifices they have made for me? Never! they have given me all they could freely, and I have taken it as freely; and we have only felt we were bound closer to each other in this way. To you, sir, I do feel grateful, oppressed even by my obligations; but there is a love great enough to lay aside all such feelings as these.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed the old man,



'she's got "a will of her own;" I have found the Scotch blood at last.'

But Nelly was too excited to hear the remark, or to heed the great compliment he intended to pay her. She only listened when he said—

'All very sentimental, I have no doubt, but people can't live on sentiment, as you'll discover when you are married to one of the loafing sons, which I suppose is what they'll inveigle you into.'

Poor Nell! Fancy her feelings at hearing her handsome, clever-looking George called a loafing young man. Of course, Mr Davidson meant George; nobody could be silly enough to think that she would marry Fred or Jack; and then to dare to say they would inveigle her. If there were fifty Mr Davidsons present, she would not let such an insult pass. So, setting her little mouth firmly together, innocent Nelly lets out her secret at once, making the old grey eyes twinkle and the thin lips twitch like a wicked brownie, as he was.

'I never expected you to enter into what you term my sentiment, Mr Davidson, but as to being inveigled into marrying one of Mrs Esdaile's sons, I can only tell you that there's not a girl in the world but might be proud to be George Esdaile's

wife ; and if he only chooses me, however little we may have to live upon, I wouldn't change places with a queen.'

And such a sunny look came over the fresh young face that a chord is touched, and the old man leans his head upon his hand, and Nelly, fearing that she has not spoken quite properly, bends a little towards him, and says—

'But forgetting all this, dear Mr Davidson, think me anything but unmindful of your goodness, and of the kindness which made you seek out my mother's child ; and though I cannot live with you, still remember your old friend's daughter, from whom you will ever be entitled to respect and gratitude ; and if ever you are ill, or think I could—' but here she was stopped by—

'There, there, child, that will do ; go away, and say no more about it. I will see you are home by Christmas Day.'

There were busy hands, but rather heavy hearts in Charleswood Street. It was Christmas Eve, and yet there were no tidings of Nelly. Jack, however, determined to believe to the last moment that she would return. Mrs Esdaile held stoutly by him, and helped him to cut out the letters to form 'Welcome,' which Jack had determined should be set up in red, white,

and blue, or ornamented with a wreath of holly. Below it Nelly's portrait was to be placed. Papa quite entered into the plan, but rather damped Jack's energy by suggesting that it should be made so that it could be easily taken down if it was not wanted. Fred, to their great relief, went out to spend the evening at the house of a young lady, to whom, since Nelly's absence, he had become violently attached, while poor George sat first in one room, and then in another, trying to write—to read—to do anything to still the anxiety that seemed to master him.

Christmas morning dawned at length, and such a lovely morning, too; bright, and crisp, and cheerful, and quite in tune with the merry bells, and happy faces, and the holiday air which pervades every nook and corner of dear old England. Each of the Esdailes felt that that day Nelly's name could not be mentioned in the family circle. Even Jack was silent. He adorned old Tom, her cat, with an enormous bow of rose-coloured ribbon, which he had bought for the purpose, causing that poor animal to be as ill at ease as the rest of the family. The bird sang in a smart new cage, the result of a subscription, and the myrtle pot was adorned with a frill like a ham. Dick had arrived the night before, and proved

a most valuable acquisition, having much to hear and to tell, and thus preventing the awkward silence which otherwise they would have fallen into every now and then.

'Come, boys,' says the father, 'let's be off to church, and thank God for sparing us to sing our Christmas hymn together again.'

When the three youngest have left the room, he turns to where Mary Esdaile is leaning her head against her son in that dumb sympathy which is more powerful than words, and, putting his arms round her, says—

'George, my boy, don't despair. Your mother and I in all our troubles found it our greatest comfort to know "God is where he was,"—ready to lighten the burden of every one who tries bravely to bear it. Don't think we don't feel for you because we ask you to go with us, and on this day, above all others, try to forget trials and disappointments, and dwell only on our comforts and mercies, and praise the hand which so liberally bestows them.'

So when they all walked off together, Mrs Esdaile on her husband's arm, and her eldest son on the other side, George talked away most cheerfully. The church door was reached before they had decided which

of them was most like their father, and which like their mother. One opinion was universal—that Jack was his father's very image—a compliment which did not seem to meet with that young gentleman's approval, since he declared 'it was a shame of them all to foist him off upon the "governor" because he was the youngest.'

After church was over, and they turned homewards, some feeling seemed to draw them all closer together, and as the boys put their arms into each other's, the mother looked into her husband's face, and saw her proud happy thoughts reflected back. As they stood on the step the cloud seemed hovering over them again for a minute, but before their faces were quite grave the door was flung open, and a cry arose of 'Here she is! Hurrah! Didn't I say she'd come back? Oh! my darling.' Nelly is in every one's arms at once, and crying and laughing at the same moment. Nobody knew what was said for the next half hour; they had to tell all they had thought and felt, how they feared she would not be able, after all, perhaps, to keep her promise, and Nelly declared Mr Davidson was so provoking. He had come up to London with her two days before, and, though she was ready long before ten o'clock, he kept her, first by one pretext, and then another,

all the while telling her that she had better stay with him, as by that time they had certainly given her up, and were thanking him for relieving them of such a plague. At this point a torrent of epithets and exclamations was hurled at Mr Davidson.

'And since I told him I was going to return home,' continued Nelly, 'he has been more grumpy than ever, snapping and snarling at everybody and everything. The servants say it is all his liver, and he says he hasn't got one, so I don't know which it is, but certainly something about him is quite wrong.'

'Ah!' said Mr Esdaile, 'I'll tell you the secret. He hasn't had a tyrant like this' (patting his wife's cheek) 'to keep him in order; so let him be a warning to you, boys, for it's better to be a slave to somebody than a slave to yourself.'

'Indeed you are right,' answered George, laughing, 'for I have been vexing, tormenting, and worrying myself most sorely since Nelly has been away.'

'Then take your tyrant,' said his father, putting Nelly towards him.

'Oh, papa!' exclaimed Mrs Esdaile, fearing the lovers might not like this publicity of their unexpressed feelings, 'you mustn't——'

'Never mind, mother,' said George,

who has put his arm round Nelly, 'there is a language more powerful than words; and I know, before all the world, that now I can claim Nelly as my own.'

And that impertinent little Nell, though her face was like a 'red red rose,' never looked down, but nodded and smiled her approval, and pursed up her little mouth to receive a kiss from each one there

'Well, I don't care,' says Jack, 'I call it a jolly shame. Here's Nell been away a whole year, and the first minute she comes back George goes and chouses everybody else out of her.'

I couldn't describe the happy day they had, nor the triumph of Martha, who 'know'd she was coming back, and laid a place for her;' nor the pudding, which Nelly said was more delicious than anything she had ever tasted when away, owing, as Jack would have it, to his having superintended the making of it. At which everybody pretended to notice a scarcity of fruit and candied peel. Then each one had to have their health drunk, and something special to be congratulated upon that had happened to them this year. At length Mrs Esdaile says—

'Now *I* have some one's health to propose; that is, Mr Davidson's. In the midst of all our happiness I cannot help

thinking of the poor lonely old man.'

'Why, he wanted to steal our Nell from us,' cried Jack.

'Ah! she's very unfortunate, Jack,' replied his father; 'she has escaped one thief to fall immediately into the hands of another. However, let us all join in drinking Mr Davidson's health.'

Then Nelly continued—

'My wish is that the next heir he chooses may not be so rich in love, and may therefore value his money more, and try to make him more happy.'

'Hurrah!' cried Jack, 'here's grumpy old Davidson's health, and a new liver to him.'

'But,' said Nelly, 'I'm forgetting he gave me a letter, which was not to be opened until after dinner. Here it is.'

'Ah! that's your ticket of discharge, Nell, with the corner cut off, as Hal would say. Shall I read it?—or George had better, then he'll be prepared for the worst.' So George opened the letter and began:—

'MY DEAR ELEANOR,

'Before you open this letter you will, no doubt, after the manner of your sex, have freely commented on me and my actions. I heard your verdict of me long ago—"not a bad old man, but so grumpy."



That verdict is not very wide of the mark. My life has been made up of disappointments—disappointments at which I laugh now, and wonder how they could have wrinkled my heart and my face. Your mother was the bright star of days when I had faith in myself and all around me; though a wise Providence denied me the blessing of her love, her memory forbade me to believe that truth, and love, and pure sweet womanhood had become an idle tale. Your loving heart and faithful trust to those whom you prized more dearly than worldly wealth daily improved me, and wore off some of the crust of worldliness which encircled many good feelings which I once possessed.

‘At first I doubted you; but now—and this is the highest praise I could accord to any mortal—holding your mother, as I do, the perfect type of a woman loving, tender, and true, I can say in you she lives again.

‘Grumpy, my dear, I shall ever be, but henceforth I hope not “a bad old man;” and my money, which I have often thought of with bitterness, will acquire a new value to me, when I know that it will speed the union of yourself with that very worthy young man to whom you have given the blessing of your love.

'To-morrow I am coming to see you, and to thank our good kind friends for having trained you up to be worthy of your mother's honourable name, and so rendered a life-long obligation to

'Your sincere friend and cousin,

'Miss Eleanor Hall.' 'DONALD DAVIDSON.'

And come he did, and always declared he could never regain his stiffness, because Nelly took all the starch out of him when she sobbed out her penitence and told him how she had thought him unfeeling, and cruel, and hard-hearted, and that he was quite mistaken in her, for she was a very wicked ungrateful girl. He had known of George's love for her from the first, for Mr Esdaile had spoken of it to him, and he quite approved of her choice.

Before New Year's Day they were all the best friends in the world. The old man declared that he began to feel as he did when he was young, and knew the meaning of a home. Jack was his special favourite, for he made no secret of the light in which he had formerly viewed Mr Davidson, and the result was that, after they had enjoyed some treat together, which Jack declared to have been particularly jolly, and 'I shouldn't have seen it,



sir, if it hadn't been for you,' the old gentleman would slyly say, 'Then, after all, it was not such an ill wind that brought that "grumpy Mr Davidson."' '

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## NOTRE DAME DES SEPT DOULEURS.

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### I.



THE 20th of May is a day I always remember and keep, especially dedicating it to raking up old memories, airing old grievances, looking in the glass to find out all the wrinkles in my face, no longer so young nor so pleasant to look upon as it was some twenty years ago, when I was suddenly recalled from an excursion I had been making in fairyland, and found myself put down at one of the first stations in the 'vale of tears.' One of these anniversaries happened while I was at Tourville; and with a determination not to inflict my dulness on my companions, I rose early to try and walk off some of my sad humour. When I reached the summit of the hill I was

not sorry to go into the Church of 'Notre Dame des Sept Douleurs' and sit quiet. Silently nursing my grief, the place I was in forgotten, the people around me unseen, memory sometimes giving me a sharp stab and anon 'pouring in oil and wine,' my heart, which was 'hot and restless,' grew calmer, and my senses one by one began to open. I heard the low solemn tones of the organ, smelt the faint lingering scent of the incense, and saw I was sitting near an altar of carved white marble, the centre piece being the Virgin contemplating her Divine Son. The figures were half hidden by vases holding white and gold lilies; the altar-cloth was blue, and standing in front were two pots holding each a lovely Marguerite, the votive offering, I supposed, of the woman who knelt at the low rail behind them; and then my eyes must needs rest upon her, and all my artist admiration be filled to the brim by her graceful attitude—the arms folded over her breast, the small head thrown slightly back to let her eyes fall on the inscription 'Virgini Compatienti.' I could not see her face, but I could imagine the beauty of those eyes, dark and deep-set, the creamy paleness of the skin, the full passionate mouth, quivering in its intensity of feeling, and the rapt, earnest expression. I would not disturb

her for the world, but I must look upon her face. So I sat waiting for her to turn, thinking if I took out the old-fashioned comb what a wealth of raven locks I should set free, and wondering with strange curiosity what sorrow or joy brought her there. She moves; the head slowly droops down, and while I am conjuring up the face now that the heavy lashes lie on the cheek, the thick white lids hide the eyes, she rises and turns full upon me, and I spring to my feet, my face all red with surprise and disappointment to find that this exquisite figure, with grace in every movement, and a head for Psyche, belongs to a face sharp-featured, sunken-eyed, and pale. 'Pardon, Madame,' I involuntarily exclaimed, feeling how rude she must think my brusque movement and fixed stare. She gave me a slight inclination of her head, and I saw her leave the church, and a few minutes after I followed, and went out to the little churchyard overlooking the valley of the Seine. There, too, she sat, looking down on the magnificent view, her face wearing a look that comes only from a heart filled with great contentment. I suppose it was my peculiar frame of mind that made me feel drawn towards any one who seemed to be suffering or to have suffered, and now impelled me to go near her and

make some observation on the lovely scene before us. We were soon chatting pleasantly enough on the surrounding objects, I explaining what our English churches were like, and trying to convey to her mind the estimation in which we held the Virgin. 'We only reverence her,' I said; 'we never pray to her nor ask her aid in any way.'

She turned her earnest face towards me, and said, 'How sad!' in such a pitying tone that I was emboldened to ask her, would she think it impertinent curiosity if I wanted to know what brought her that morning to the church? She hesitated for a moment, and then replied,

'The heart of Madame is heavy, perhaps; shall I tell her my little history? Oh, a very simple story, only to show how by our faith and His love the good God allows our burdens to be removed and our sorrows turned into joy.'

I silently assented, and she began:

'You have been down the Rue St Dominique, and shivered, perhaps, to think how miserable to live in a street long and narrow, the grim, black-looking old houses trying to stretch across and touch each other, and by meeting exclude the smallest ray of sunshine, lest, when it has



struggled through, it will light up some of the curious old carved work about them, and reveal the dark stories which, though time has thrown a veil over them, it is whispered, have had their tragedies played out there. Above the diamond-paned windows of one of the oldest of these wooden-fronted houses is a board which tells you that there lives Denise Gastel; and there he lived four-and-twenty years ago, and had a little daughter born to him, whose eyes looked so blue and her face so fair that they named her Veronique. She grew to be the pet of the whole street, and you might meet her toddling from one house to the other, her unsteady steps guided by some neighbour's child, but most frequently by a handsome, fair boy, the son of Jacques Defour, who lived in the next house. Jacques was a stern man, who had taken little pleasure in life since he lost his wife, who died when Antoine was born, and now Antoine was disappointing him by growing a dreamy boy, who would rather sit and listen entranced to the sound of the organ at the cathedral, than play at soldiers or pranks in the tanner's yard or among the dyer's vats. Monsieur le Curé took much notice of Antoine, and got him into favour with Monsieur Prasdil, the organist, and by the

time Antoine was fourteen, in spite of Jacques Defour's opposition and anger, he was forced to allow his son to go to Paris, where a friend of Monsieur Prasdil offered to teach him, and make him a great musician like himself. It was a grand opportunity, every one said, but Jacques only told them to thank Heaven for not sending them such a "ganache," whom idleness alone prevented from being an honest tanner, as his father and grandfather had been before him. Antoine loved his father, and it was no small grief to the boy's sensitive nature to see how they misunderstood and vexed each other. Often would the little Veronique find him moody and oppressed, and by putting her arms round him, and rubbing her cheek against his, show him mute sympathy with a grief she could not understand. One April morning at four o'clock young Antoine left the old Rue St Dominique to enter on his new life. Ah, Madame, slow may be the "steps that leave a heart behind," but heavy is the heart which leaves no love behind; to go out into the world shrinking, fearing, leaving no loving mother to look at the vacant chair, and send up a prayer for blessing and protection on her absent darling; no dear sister to tell how sweet the next meeting will be, when

the loved one returns with all the honours she knows are but waiting to be heaped upon him. Alas, poor Antoine! beyond the day nobody but the little Veronique would miss him, and the heart, hungering for love, made him turn and take a last look at her window, and at it, he says, he saw an angel, for the child, awakened by the stir outside, had crept from her little bed and ran to the window, and was, in her eager anxiety to attract his attention, stretching out her arms towards him. Antoine will always have it that his love sprang into being at that moment, and never after did he think of his home in the grim old street but he saw that window, and between the pots of Marguerites and Narcissus the little face all flushed with grief, the tears standing in her eyes, and her mouth parted as she calls him to "Come back, come back."

'After Antoine had left, Jacques Defour married again, and all love for his boy seemed to die straight away. I think he was proud when he heard how clever the master thought Antoine — that he had assisted in playing the organ at mass, and that it was not impossible that at some distant day the realization of the boy's dreams might come to pass, and he might be organist in the grand old church

we love so well, but he seldom sent a letter, and never asked him home for a holiday.

‘The little Veronique grew into a tall girl,—they called her a beauty, and Denise Gastel, her father, had many a sharp word to say to the smart young soldiers who always took such an interest in the flowers which blossomed so gaily in front of the little window, where Veronique and her young sister Babette sat. Many pretty gifts had found their way from Paris to the Rue St Dominique, and when Veronique’s fête day came round, she looked forward with more eagerness to Antoine’s present than to any of the numerous gifts she knew would come to her. I know not whether she was vain, because she wore her beauty as a queen might wear her crown,—it was hers by right, she thought, and if people offered homage, it was only that which was due to her: she had no soft heart for the girls who sat out the dance, who had no lover to tell them how they outshone all others. If her beauty drew away an admirer from one to whom before he had been devoted, she only felt triumph, not regret; wherever she went *of course* she had most attention. Was she not the “belle of Tourville”? the “flower of the Rue St Dominique”? and had not a painter

asked permission to paint her picture and taken it to Paris with him? She would not marry for a long time; then, if Antoine became a great man, and the organist, perhaps, of St Pierre, she would marry *him*, but not until she had reduced him to despair by tantalizing him with jealousy of all her other lovers. You shake your head, Madame; ah! you will pity her yet.

‘ While all this was going on in Tourville, in Paris there was one very sad heart,—that heart belonged to Antoine Defour. You would not have recognized bright sunny-faced Antoine, for his laughing blue eyes were hidden by ugly dark spectacles, and his smiling mouth pinched with the anxiety to know whether he should ever regain his sight. In his little garret he had studied so hard to overcome the defects in his imperfect education, that his eyes became weaker and weaker, until the doctor said they must have perfect rest or his sight would go. Perfect rest! that almost meant starvation, for Antoine nearly supported himself by copying music for part-singing and playing. So now his days were spent in wandering from one church to another. Sometimes he went to St Roch, then to St Eustache, then to St Clotilde—anywhere, to hear music,

not to pray. The poor heart was as dim and blind as the eyes, yet he felt no anxiety about that; but as he grew weaker he found even this pleasure must be given up, for now, as the peals of the organ fell upon his ear, or the sweet voices of the choir sent up their praise, the tears rained from his poor weak eyes, leaving them more inflamed and dark than ever. What pleasure, what comfort, had Antoine? If he wandered into the gardens of the Tuileries, and groped his way to a bench, his heart seemed to feel the more heavy because of the merry laughter of the children playing and romping in the sunshine, which he could only feel, not see, while their *bonnes*, disregarding the presence of the poor blind man, went on confiding to each other their little love-stories, and the hopes of enjoyment they had for the next *fête-day*. Weary of this, he would move on to the Champs Elysées. Worse and worse: the roll of the carriages and gay hum of passers-by only filled him with bitterness. Why should hundreds of people be happy, and have wealth, and beauty, and all they wanted, while he—he only asked for health and strength? and then, spite of hardship and poverty, he could revel in his mistress—Art, and envied not the Emperor himself. But

blind, half starving, his pride bent, and forced to accept charity from those he had worked for—oh, would to God he could die! for if in the end he had to return to his father useless, helpless, dependent, then surely the bitterness of death would be outdone. And Veronique, too, she was like the rest of the world—could acknowledge his presents, which he had stinted himself to send her—could return a shy note to his long, earnest letter; but nearly six months had passed, and not one word from her, though she must have heard from his father of his affliction, because Jacques Defour had written to say, when he could do nothing else he had better come home. And it was fast coming to this. He could do nothing else; he must return to the old house. Oh, what a different return from that his imagination had pictured, when he had seen Monsieur Prasdil allowing his old favourite to take the organ, and he, inspired, would play as he had never done before; and below would be his boyish friends, his father, and blue-eyed Veronique: and then, after mass, Monsieur le Curé would say some kind words of approval, and his father, in his rough way, would be touched, and say he forgave his son now for not being a tanner: and Veronique, his child-love, would flush and

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look as he remembered she had done at parting, and when he had drawn her apart, and they walked together among the old trees close by, he would whisper, "Veronique, you called after me when I left, 'Antoine, come back!' The echo of those words has dwelt in my heart all these years. I *have* come back!" and the thrill of his voice and the love in his eyes would tell her it was to claim her as his wife!

'How changed were these pictures now! The blackness of the grim old street was but a type of his life to come. A blind beggar, a burden to his father, until he grew, perhaps, into an old man; and then, as his imagination called up various figures he had seen sitting on the steps of churches, reminding the passers-by of their misery by rattling their tin platters, he threw himself down in a passion of tears, entreating God to release him from his wretchedness and desolation.

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## II.

ALL this happened seven years ago; and perhaps Madame knows that at that



time Tourville was swept over by a terrible fever. It raged among its narrow streets, and only the Rue St Dominique was free. Some thought this was because of the water running fresh before the houses; some because of the tanners' yards. Any way, there was but one victim there, and that was Veronique. Nobody thought she would ever recover; but her youth, her strength battled with the plague, and after robbing her of all her beauty, it left her to try and feebly struggle back to life; and Madame's womanly heart would have ached for the poor vain child when she first saw herself after her calamity,—the round, rosy face pale and shrunken, eyes dimmed, hair gone, all beauty vanished! The sceptre had indeed departed from the "flower of the Rue St Dominique." But her torture was when some unlucky chance threw one of her former lovers in her way, to see the struggle between the wish not to wound her, and the shock given by her altered appearance. No; she could not get reconciled to it—to have walked in proud consciousness that every head turned to look again with admiration, and now to know that if she went out, they who knew her regarded her with pity, and they who knew her not did not look at her at all. Six months had passed since Veronique lost

her beauty, and she was getting accustomed to hear people say, when Babette was praised, "She will never be equal to you, Veronique, before you had the fever." The young soldiers still looked up at the little window where the flowers blossomed so gaily, but they seldom saw but one head. Veronique shrank back now: she was very changed from the girl who sat still in her proud beauty, enjoying their sighs, and triumphing in their unreturned love!

'One evening there was an unusual stir in the street in front of the doors; the neighbours stood in groups of four and five, discussing some event of evident interest, for with us, Madame, we all share each other's joys and sorrows. This excitement was caused by the return of Antoine, and from his father Veronique heard how Antoine had come back to be a burden on him for life. Jacques said it was of no use her coming in, for Antoine would let nobody talk to him or see him, if he could help it. Can you not fancy how the girl's heart warmed towards this poor fellow-sufferer? She had so dreaded his return, and because she had not heard from him, nor had a present come among the few which reached her this fête-day, she had felt very bitter towards her old friend. Now she could not even be sorry for his affliction, because

of her joy that he would not see her altered face.

‘The next morning was Sunday, and with much inward fear and trembling, though with great outward boldness, Veronique entered her neighbour’s house, and walking straight up to Etienne said, “Dear Etienne, thou hast not forgotten little Veronique, whose steps thou so carefully guided when she was a child? Until God removes this affliction thou must now trust thyself to her care: so come, we will go to mass together.” And after that, Madame, Antoine was always to be found with Veronique. She no longer shrunk from going out; she cared no more that people did not turn to look after her. Unheeded passed her former admirers, with some beauty whose rivalry she had formerly scorned. Antoine was becoming her world; to walk under the chestnut trees of the horse-fair with him, to go daily to St Pierre, and sometimes hear his fingers straying over the keys of the organ; to come on a fête-day, or Sunday, and sit in this very spot; this was more real enjoyment than the girl had experienced in the days of her power and beauty, when her heart was too small to care for any one but herself. But one remnant of the old vanity remained. No one had spoken to Etienne of the change

in her, and when he told her in the soft autumn evenings, how he remembered her face; that the memory of it was his sweetest recollection; that even now he could tell how she was looking. "Listen! he would describe her." Oh, Madame, how could she break the charm? for to hear his soft, sad voice praising her, was music such as had never fallen on her ears before.

'So the autumn went into winter; and even in winter they could often go out, and in the evenings Antoine sat close by Veronique's side, and held her wool or carded it, or did many helpful things, for now he was getting more accustomed to darkness. He still went to the hospital, and the good doctor was trying all his skill could devise to strengthen him;—he did not give him hope, but he bade him not cast it from him altogether. Sometimes the neighbours just laughed a little at Veronique about her blind lover, but she heeded not. She had resolved to learn some trade, so that Antoine should not burden any one, but be her loving care, and he should help her, that he might not feel it was she who was the bread-winner; and if, as she feared, he never regained his sight, why then he would never know her beauty had departed, and even when she was old, to him she would still be his

“child love, Veronique.” Antoine would often ask her, where did she meet her admirers? and reproach himself, saying it was he who kept her lovers from her; and then he would hide his face, and be so downcast and gloomy, because words rose thick and fast from his heart, which his lips dared not utter; but he might have said them, Madame, for as they who are in a barren land long for rain, so the girl thirsted to hear she was beloved.

‘The winter passed and May came; and because it is the “Mois de Marie” our churches were lovely with decorations, and great pots of white lilies, azaleas, Marguerites, and all the flowers the pure and blessed Virgin loves to see her children bring as offerings to her. On the first Sunday the service was especially grand at St Pierre. The music was lovely, and Veronique could see how heavy was Antoine’s heart because within him was the consciousness that, but for his affliction, he too could draw forth sounds from the organ which would lift up the souls of the hearers towards heaven.

‘The sermon was given by the celebrated Père Raoul, and he told us how much *real faith* could do, and that during this month the ears of “our Lady” were more especially to be gained by those who

called upon her without doubt or fear, and with that earnest tender love they would have her clothe their petitions to her dear Son with ; and while the words came from his mouth, swift into Veronique's heart flew the thought and resolve that she would ask for sight to be given to those poor darkened eyes, and that every morning during the month she would rise early enough to reach this very church, and ask the "tender Mother" to intercede for her with Him who in days of old "made the blind to see. He but *spake* the word and *immediately* they received sight."

'Slowly and silently Antoine and Veronique returned to the old street, she looking lingeringly, lovingly, on his face, which was full of beauty. When they arrived home she went to her little room, and leaning her elbows on the mantel-shelf, looked long and earnestly at the plain colourless face she saw reflected in the old-fashioned dim looking-glass; and the tempter trying to dissuade her, whispered, "If he gets his sight, he will care no more for you, he will despise your deception; and should he offer to marry you, pity, not love, will prompt him." The bitter tears would drop at the fear lest this should prove true; but God, Madame, had, by trouble, so softened this little frivolous

heart that Veronique felt should this even come to pass Antoine's happiness was dearer than all else; why, she would have willingly given him her life, though that seemed not half so dear to her as his love!

' When morning dawned Veronique was on her way. She bade sleepy Babette keep her secret, for she had made a vow, she said, and was but fulfilling it. Babette whispered it to her mother, who hinted it to her father, and we Catholics respect these things too much to put obstacles in the way by undue curiosity. So Veronique's visits passed unquestioned. Strength was given her not to feel so very very tired, for the way is long; but her heart was in her task, and she was never so weary as to deny Antoine his walk. Well, Madame, a week from that Monday the good doctor sent for Antoine, and when he went it was to see a famous man from your own country, who had come to Tourville for a holiday. From the moment he saw Antoine he took the greatest interest in him; and with Monsieur Charpentier's permission he altered the treatment and pursued an entirely new plan; but to carry it out he must go into the Hotel Dieu, as an operation would most probably be needed. That was a very dreary time,—nobody was permitted to see Antoine, and Veronique

used to turn from the door with weary steps, and seating herself where she could catch a glimpse of the window of the room where the good sister said he lay, she wished that she had "wings like a dove," that she might hover round and comfort him. I cannot tell Madame how earnestly she prayed. Madame knows how the heart goes forth when its petition is for all it holds dear. Veronique knew that the pure and sainted Mary would hear her; and often when before her image she felt that Antoine's sight would come again, another prayer rose to her lips that his love might be hers still, but she checked it as selfish. No; she had made her choice, and asked this great gift for her dear one,—the future she must leave to the good God, who "ordereth all things well."

'May was nearly over, and for a whole fortnight nothing certain could be heard of Antoine. Jacques Defour hardly took the trouble to inquire for his son, and to poor Veronique the answers were, "Not so well," "better," "symptoms favourable," but on the last evening of the month the sister said that very day a successful operation had been performed, and now his recovery would depend on quiet and rest of mind and body; and six weeks after, as one Sunday afternoon Denise Gastel,



his wife, Babette and Veronique sat enjoying rest, a quick footstep was heard which made Veronique's heart beat like a "caged bird against its prison bars," and then suddenly stop and turn to stone. It was Antoine, who rushed into the room. At sight of him Denise and his wife threw up their hands in astonishment, Babette sprang from her seat, Veronique alone sat quiet. Then was it any wonder that Antoine should turn to Babette, and cry with a sob, "Veronique, God has heard my prayer,—I see your dear face again"? Oh, Madame, the bitterness of that moment! Before his mistake was made known to him, the girl, carrying the heavy load of her poor bruised heart, was going as swiftly as she could towards St Genifrède hill, that she might find comfort from "Notre Dame des Douleurs;" and when, exhausted, she reached the chapel, she could but throw herself before the blessed figures, and repeat the inscription "Virgini Compatienti." How long she kneeled there she knew not; but, when hours after she wearily rose to her feet and turned, she confronted the sad pale face of Antoine. Madame, they needed only to look into each other's eyes; there Veronique read that Antoine knew and forgave her bitterness and weakness, and Antoine read the

love which had given birth to both ; and folding her to his heart, he murmured, "Veronique, my child-love, my joy, my wife, through the life we will spend together, remember that love is always blind."

'They live in Paris now, Madame. Antoine is organist at St Eustache, and his name is known to all lovers of music ; but every year during the Mois de Marie they spend one week at Tourville, coming each day to this chapel with some little offering to our blessed Lady, who heard them in their season of trial, and presented their petitions in the hour of their need.

'The story has seemed long, perhaps, and tired Madame ; but she will pardon it, for I am Veronique, and see—Antoine my husband comes across the grass to meet me.'

AT THE SIGN OF

THE GOLDEN CANISTER.

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I.



NOT such a very long time ago there stood in a certain quarter of one of the oldest towns in England a low, long, gable-roofed house, adorned both outside and inside with much curious wood-work and carving. Long narrow windows, encircled with quaint wooden balconies, overshadowed one another, each story protruding beyond the story below, while on a wide black beam they who ran might read 'Amour avec Loiaulte.'

But very few people ever ran past the sign of the Golden Canister. Strangers stood to admire this relic of days long past, while the townspeople lingered about it, and finally sauntered in to have a chat

with Luke Barton, the owner of the shop and of its valuable stock of tea, coffee, and spices. These were all the wares that the Golden Canister *professed* to supply, though from its well-filled stores you might likewise obtain figs, raisins, nuts, honey, and like delicacies. For such common necessaries as bacon, cheese, candles, and soap, you had to go elsewhere. No one ever spoke of Luke Barton as a grocer; it would have been looked upon as showing a want of due respect and consideration to one who was known far and near as Mr Barton of the Golden Canister, nay, whose house gentlefolks from all parts had come to see as a curiosity the like of which was not often to be come across.

The simple townfolk did well to show pride in the old house—one where princes had sighed and sued in vain; where proud beauties had held revel, had despaired, been courted, neglected, and forgotten. But our story has to do with none of these: it only pretends to recount the simple everyday life of those who then dwelt there, and who lived, and loved, and played out their little tragedy with as much gladness and bitterness of heart as did those courtly dames, although their joys and griefs were all unheeded by the many who sighed to know the bygone histories of the great

and noble, forgetting that the natural cravings and disappointments of men and women have been in all ages pretty much the same.

At the Golden Canister lived Luke Barton; his wife, Lettice; Leonard, their son; and Phyllis, the only child of Luke's brother, left an orphan from her babyhood. That he should live until Leonard made Phyllis his wife, and the young pair took possession of the Golden Canister, was the grand wish of Luke's heart. And there seemed every prospect that his desire would be gratified. He chuckled over the idea of standing idly by, and seeing how the young folks would manage matters. 'None so different, I warrant,' was his self-congratulatory expression, adding confidentially, 'Phyllis is the wife's right hand;' the person who was to be mistress in place of Lettice Barton being thus clearly signified.

Now, surely, the near approach of their felicity should have made Phyllis and Leonard very happy. But no. They seemed by mutual consent to avoid each other; or if by chance they were thrown together, Phyllis was silent and Leonard was embarrassed. There had been a time when the day was not long enough for all they had to talk about. But that time was

apparently forgotten by Leonard, while bitterly did Phyllis recall the memory of a joy departed for ever. And even now, although it is the night of Leonard's birthday party, and she is standing in her own little room, contemplating a beautifully-worked muslin dress, such as Lady Grace might envy, the tears fill her eyes. At length she buries her face in her hands, and gives vent to the grief which has all day long been lying heavily at her heart. What could be the reason of Leonard's altered manner towards her? For the last two months he had been like a different being. They had had no quarrel of any kind, but suddenly he seemed to grow cold and indifferent; then had come, on his part, bursts of tenderness such as she had never seen before. And these outbreaks would be followed by fits of gloom and irritability, and then he would go out and remain until very late, and next morning be distant and silent, and try to avoid her in every way. Where could he go? He was always leaving about eight and never returning until past twelve or one o'clock. If it was, as he said, to have a rubber with some men, why did he take such pains to look his best? It could never be for men that he was always putting on new neckties,

and speaking sharply if his shirts were not got up to his liking.

Without any acknowledged engagement between Phyllis and Leonard, they had drifted into looking upon each other in the same light as everybody else looked upon them, that is, as affianced man and wife, and until this doubt had crept in, Phyllis, in the contentment of perfect happiness, had never asked herself what Leonard was to her. But now she put the question to her heart, and it answered—her life, her hope, the one man she had ever loved, or ever could love. And what if he had ceased to care for her, and she had lost him? ‘Oh! no! no!’ she cried aloud in her misery, as she sank down and prayed that, no matter what she might suffer, what troubles and trials she might have to bear, she might still keep Leonard’s love and become his wife. Then, hearing the clock strike eight, and the drawing on of the shutters preparatory to closing, she rose hastily, bathed her face, and ran down-stairs to superintend the lighting-up of the dancing-room and the final adjustment of the decorations, because, as her aunt declared, ‘the young men could never be satisfied things were right unless Phyllis was head and chief.’ This was true, for from the grey-headed

managing-man, with a wife and five children, down to old deaf Dick, the cellarman, they were all Phyllis's devoted slaves, challenging any one to name a fairer beauty, and proclaiming her gentleness and goodness whenever a chance presented itself. Had her intended husband been any other than Leonard, though he might be heir to all the estates around, they would have unanimously declared him unworthy of a bride about whom each told some tale of gentle thought and womanly tenderness.

But Leonard in their esteem ranked with Phyllis; so the men who envied him only equalled their women folk, who envied her, and they had both in the end to rejoice that fate had decided that this perfect pair should mate together.

If on this day poor Phyllis's heart had been sore and heavy, she had not been the only one to suffer. Leonard, on his part, had not known one minute's peace, and he gave a sigh of relief when he found himself alone and able to look as dejected and miserable as he felt. 'What can I do?' he muttered half aloud. 'I never will go through such another day, I am determined. While people were congratulating me, I felt and looked like a culprit. And why? Because I cannot accept the wife



my father has provided for me? Is that a crime? Is a man to hang his head, and be ashamed to look up, because he finds it impossible to control his feelings and affections? Of course, when I knew no better, I fancied I loved Phyllis; but now I would not, I could not, marry her. And she? I know she *thinks* she cares for me, but that is not love. It would be impossible for a nature like Phyllis's to feel for any man what Norah feels for me. She would be a little low-spirited for a day or two, and then she'd remember the cabbages wanted pickling, the jam wanted re-boiling, and her domestic duties would greatly counteract any grief she might feel; but Norah would break her heart. She says if she thought the man she gave her love to did not return it, she should die—the very idea would kill her. My father and mother must love her. She would win any person's love, only I cannot bear to disappoint the dear old souls, whose hearts are set upon having Phyllis for a daughter. How I wish I had not let it go on so long! I never suspected that the old man had talked so openly of giving up the business; but I won't dance with Phyllis—people shan't say I deceived them that far, and she's sure to get plenty of partners. I suppose I *have* kept other fellows away from

her. Well, they can come forward now; she will get a better match than I, for of course she'll marry; at least, I wish her to.'

Now Leonard was deceiving himself, as he had been doing ever since the little old-fashioned theatre opened for the winter season with several distinguished stars from London, and among them Miss Norah Churchill. Of course, he went, with all the other young men, to see the fascinating actress, who, as report said, had driven all the young aristocrats in London to desperation. And though it seemed wonderful that one so sought after should consent to leave all this homage in order that she might charm the humbler *habitués* of a country theatre, very soon the most sceptical believed the tale; for whether in tragedy, comedy, or burlesque, Miss Norah was equally attractive.

The very first night Leonard went to the theatre Dick Tatton declared she never took her eyes off him; and though Leonard laughed at Dick for being such a fool as to say so, yet he went the next night, and the next, until some one offered to introduce him. The result was that he forgot his father and mother's wishes, forgot Phyllis even, and was resolved, whatever came, if his idol would but condescend to accept

him, that she should become his wife, and reign queen at the Golden Canister. While he was with his enslaver, the task seemed easy enough ; but when absent from her, he decidedly felt his courage fail every time he wanted to tell his parents that he found he could no longer love Phyllis sufficiently to make her his wife, and that his choice had fallen upon another. And when they would ask him who that other was, what could he say ? Ah ! that was the true secret which tied Leonard's tongue ; for Luke Barton and his wife were proud folk, and held strong prejudices against every girl who was not hedged in by watchful relations and proprieties, such as befitted the maidenly state. All those who exhibited their charms publicly for gain, they sweepingly placed under one category, whether the boards they trod belonged to the opera-house of a city or the booth of a country fair. And if they ever spoke of these beings, who had almost a different nature from their own, it was with a pity more akin to scorn than to love. The task was thus no easy one, and most men would have shrunk before they communicated a fact which Leonard knew would embitter his parents' old age. At first Phyllis had been his principal obstacle ; how should he tell her ? how would she take it ? But

while he was considering these things Phyllis had grown silent and distant, and had latterly avoided him. It was evident that she had never cared for him, so that made one part of the business easier. However, it was no use bothering his head any more. Tell them he must, for the company of the Theatre Royal had left for a neighbouring town, and Norah had written, giving Leonard a full description of the reception she had met with from the officers quartered there. So now there was added to Leonard's other distractions the fear lest some rival should steal this jewel, which he felt all the world must be, like himself, longing to possess.

While Leonard, thus worried and perplexed, is obliged to go down-stairs, and try to wear a pleasant smile on his face, and listen to the good wishes and *mal à propos* congratulations of the fast-arriving guests, let us say a few words about the cause of his distraction, Norah Churchill. Her real name was Eleanor Church, but from her childhood she had been taught that the less she had to say about the realities of her life the better. Mrs Churchill had talked so much and so frequently before her daughter of their better days, when they mixed with the proudest of the land, that Norah tried to believe that something

of the kind must have existed before her wretched childhood began, since which time they had had no certain means of subsistence. During the last few years they had been much better off, but it was all through Norah's exertions. She was quick and clever, and though perhaps never likely to make a name in the theatrical world, she was almost certain, as long as her pretty face and piquant manner lasted, to be able to make enough to support herself and her mother. Before these charms failed she hoped to secure an eligible marriage.

For Leonard Barton she cared nothing except in so far as all admiration gratified her; but Mrs Churchill warmly advocated the cause of the first man who had ever offered anything when he had anything to offer. She accordingly urged Norah to consider whether she had not better secure this chance. The Bartons, she heard, were very wealthy people, and Leonard an only son. But Norah was not anxious to seal her fate. She laughed at the prospect of settling down in a remote country town, with what she termed a good-looking bumpkin, and said that some much more tempting bait must be offered before she consented to forego the charms of her profession. Mrs Churchill, however, was

not so certain about the policy of giving up this substance for a shadow, and she felt that at least it would be prudent to hold him on for a time. So it was the mother who managed that Leonard should never leave without an engagement to come again: it was she who told him of the splendid offers Norah had received, and hinted at the change which lately she had observed in the dear girl's spirits. All very wrong, no doubt, but Mrs Churchill only did what many a woman with far less excuse often tries to do. She strove to secure a comfortable home and well-to-do husband for her daughter, although she knew well that her heart was not in his keeping. Thirty years of shift, deceit, poverty, and debt tend to make people somewhat hazy in their notions of individual right and wrong. As long as Norah's welfare was secured, Leonard's happiness was a very secondary consideration to Mrs Churchill.

So it happened that while Luke and Lettice Barton were making plans to surprise their son by giving up to him the entire charge and unreserved profits of the Golden Canister, and while Phyllis was trying to keep down her bitter tears at her lover's altered manner, and Leonard was annoyed and irritated because people

would keep congratulating him on an event which he had decided should never take place, Mrs Churchill was inducing Norah to write to Leonard in the hope that jealousy would induce him to propose an immediate marriage, in which case she might talk her daughter into accepting the offer. She was vexed with Norah for laughing at poor Leonard's passionate declarations, and soundly rated her for making fun of him before her new admirer, Captain Sutherland. But the sermonizing had little effect upon Norah, who wrote the letter, and meeting the gallant captain on her way to post it, displayed to his view the bulky epistle, calling it a 'sugary sop' for 'Figs,' by which name she distinguished Leonard among her more aristocratic admirers.

But all this is unknown to Leonard, who on the evening of the dance feels almost jealous of the admiration pale Phyllis is attracting, thinking how far outshone she and all the pretty girls there would be if his bright-eyed, captivating Norah were present.

The music strikes up, the dancing begins, Leonard choosing for his partner the eldest Miss Tatton. Phyllis waited until then, and after that Leonard had no more embarrassment, for before each dance ended she had provided a partner for the next,

so that supper-time arrived, and not once had the two spoken to each other.

In the excitement nobody present noticed it, or, if they did, they fancied that this had been arranged between them. At eleven o'clock it was the custom to have 'The Triumph,' led off by Luke Barton and his wife, and as each couple there were secure of sitting together at supper, the engagements for this dance were generally made very early in the evening. No man thought of asking Phyllis; of course, she and Leonard would go in together, as they had always done. So the tune began and the places were taken, and Leonard lingered, not knowing what to do. He saw that no one else intended to claim Phyllis, yet this was the very dance he had most wished to avoid. However, it was of no use hesitating—they were nearly the last couple left. So he walked up to Phyllis, whose face had a brighter colour in it, and whose eyes sparkled more than he had ever seen them do before, as he said to her,—

'Phyllis, will you dance with me?'

'No, Leonard,' she replied.

Could that be Phyllis speaking so harshly and looking so defiantly at him? was the thought that flashed across him.

'Come, come, you two,' called out



Luke from the end of the room. 'You need not be keeping everybody waiting now. I'll warrant you'll have plenty of time together in the next fifty years for all you've got to say.'

'I think we had best dance together, Phyllis,' said Leonard. 'I don't wish to hurt my father and mother to-night.' Phyllis rose reluctantly.

'I'm sorry to force myself on you,' continued Leonard, more nettled by Phyllis's indifference than he cared to own.

'I am sorry you should have any occasion to,' returned Phyllis, her gentle nature fairly roused. 'It is quite time uncle and aunt should be told how they annoy us by coupling our names together.'

Leonard had no time to reply to this, or he would have liked to return a bitter answer; for though he had been daily longing for some word which should give him reason to say to his parents that Phyllis and he had agreed that a marriage between them would not give happiness to either, he felt quite injured and angry now that she had said something to this effect. But why? Simply because Leonard Barton had always been the darling, the idol of his father and mother, and of the whole household of the Golden Canister. Every one of them gave up to his

wishes, and indulged his slightest whim. Until the present time he scarcely knew what it was to have an ungratified wish. No one thwarted him; no one opposed him, everybody lauded his generosity and his sweet disposition—two qualities often found in those who have their entire will in everything. Not that Leonard was unamiable. On the contrary, his disposition was excellent. But he needed a great deal of wholesome disappointment, and roughing with people who did not care for him nor his feelings, before he could reach anything like the standard of even common every-day perfection. He loved Phyllis and his father and mother dearly, but to give up anything he had set his heart upon for their sakes never entered his mind. Up to the time he met Norah Churchill, he was content to accept Phyllis's love, to bestow an occasional caress upon her, and to talk all day of himself and his plans to the most patient listener man ever had.

Norah soon saw through him, and by playing with his selfishness and vanity, secured to herself a thorough slave, to whom her every caprice was law, to whom a frown was misery, and an endearment a feverish excitement too uncertain to be called happiness. She used to declare—

‘ If the boy had not been spoiled he would be perfect, his real nature is so good as often to put mine to the blush for the artifices and deceitful make-believes I must be up to. I shall never get any one more useful in practising my parts with,’ she would laughingly say, ‘ and if I had but an audience when I am playing love-making with him, what a *furor* I should create!’

And it was for this woman that Leonard Barton cut his old father and mother to the heart, made the girl whose very light of life he seemed to have become, pray to God to let her die rather than endure the misery of knowing that the love she had so long looked upon as her own was given to another.

The scene took place early on the morning of the following day, and a stormy one it was, for Luke Barton was not a man to be trifled with, and after bitterly reproaching Leonard he declared that no painted Jezebel (as in his hot wrath he called his son’s enslaver) should ever disgrace the honest name of Barton. Then Leonard blazed up, saying that his father might reproach him as he liked, but that not even his father should in his hearing utter a word against her. He defied him or the whole world to prevent his

marrying a girl who, no one could say, was less pure and good than his own mother. When further on Luke declared that Phyllis had been deceived and insulted, and that therefore Leonard must make her his wife, the young man took a bitter oath that to his dying day he would never ask Phyllis to marry him.

So all at once a great cloud seemed to have settled over the happy household. The servants went about silent, and hushed their mirth, because something (they knew not what) had gone wrong with master and mistress. Leonard, without a word, saddled his horse and went off, not to return until late in the day. Luke paced the room in gloomy reverie, while his wife watched him terrified and oppressed with fear for him, for her boy, and for Phyllis, who, locked into her little chamber, shed tears of grief and despair.

Towards evening Luke went to his niece and said—

‘Phyllis, though in name you may never be my daughter, you are and ever will be that in my heart: tell me openly, child, your wishes, and how best I can try to comfort you.’

Then Phyllis sunk down by the old man’s side and sobbed out—

‘By not being hard against *him*, uncle,

and not letting us be much talked about.'

At first Luke would not listen, and poured forth many a violent threat against Leonard, but in the end he became softened, loving Phyllis none the less, for every excuse she offered found an echo in his own heart. His pride understood hers, and rebelled sorely against their being made the subject of a nine days' gossip. Lettice was called in, and it was decided that she should take Phyllis to the house of a distant relative, where she could remain until matters were more settled.

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## II.

FORTUNATELY, in some cases, we little know what our neighbours think and say of us, else we should be much surprised to find that many of those 'household skeletons' which we have covered up carefully, and locked up almost in our own breasts, are dragged out and flaunted at the mere mention of our names. It is only at the near approach of ourselves, or one of our family, that the voices are hushed which were crying shame, or woe, or wonder, and, say they with a pitying smile, 'The poor

things fancy no one knows anything of the matter but themselves.'

So Luke Barton hugged the idea that he had completely cheated the whole town, when he told them that he did not think, after all, that he should give up just yet; that Leonard wanted to see a little more of the world before he settled down; and that as the Golden Canister was but a dull place for a young girl, he had sent Phyllis off on a visit. The old man plumed himself on the cleverness and tact which had prevented people from asking him awkward questions. Every night he and his wife congratulated each other on the wonderful way in which they had escaped being made the talk of the place. Surely it was a merciful kindness that blinded the good old couple to the fact that the whole circumstances were in every person's mouth for miles round, that half the people came to see how Luke took it, and that no word was thought too bitter for Leonard, who could try to disgrace his family, and break the heart of a girl whom a duke might have been proud to marry, and this too for a horrid designing creature, all paint and acting, who openly laughed at him and his infatuation to his very companions.

There was one hope for Leonard: if he heard how Norah was going on at

Stradbrook it must certainly cure him. Somebody ought to tell him; but, then, where was that somebody to be found? Though all knew the cause of Leonard's altered looks and moody manner, they only suggested to him that perhaps he was out of sorts, or wanted a change. Leonard, on the other hand, was too much taken up with his own feelings to think much about people's opinions, or to notice the careworn, anxious looks of his father and mother—the result of all the heart-aches they had lately endured for his sake. Lettice missed Phyllis a hundred times in an hour, and bemoaned her dear one's absence; she pictured her trying in her own brave way to put on a bright face to deceive the friend she was living with into writing that Phyllis was quite herself again. Yes, Lettice knew the misery the girl was enduring. She understood the agony that made her ask in the first outbreak of her trouble if people did not die of a broken heart. Then Leonard was a constant source of uneasiness. The way he avoided being alone with her or with his father, his moody manner, and added to all this, the gloom which seemed to have fallen over the whole house, was full of depressing influence. Luke now was often sharp and angry with his assistants for things he

would not have noticed before, and everything seemed to go wrong with everybody at the Golden Canister.

It was not altogether selfishness which made Leonard so unmindful of his parents. The poor fellow really had a sorry time of it. Stradbrook was forty miles distant, and a difficult place to get at, and he had only seen Norah twice. Though she had been very kind to him, he had found her each time surrounded by admirers, and this made him miserable with jealousy. Then she evidently did not want him to come to her often, and each time that he proposed to pay her another visit she put a dozen obstacles in the way of it. Her letters, too, were short, and she declared that she was so busy studying her parts that she had not time to write often. Leonard was thus kept in a fever of expectation, suspense, and disappointment. At length, after an unusually long interval, came a letter, saying that her engagement at Stradbrook having come to an end, an advantageous offer had been made to her from a manager at Edinburgh, which she had accepted. She was now in that city, preparing for a new series of triumphs. Then followed desperate regret at not seeing him before she left—a little melodramatic fear that he would soon cease to love



her, mixed up with a great deal of romantic tenderness, ending with a covert hint that she had heard he was in a way engaged to another, and therefore no doubt he would soon forget 'his own Norah.'

Poor Leonard! he was nearly beside himself. Why had she gone without telling him, without seeing him? Oh! she was cruel, heartless. Then he read the letter again, and wondered what she did mean. Perhaps she was jealous. She had heard something of Phyllis, and her love could not bear it. What could it be? who could have been talking about him to her? Ah, he knew it must have been Dick Tatton. He had said he was going to Stradbrook. He would go and fathom this, and Dick should be made to confess that he had been saying what was not true. So he sat down and scribbled off pages of reproach and love, vowing that, whatever came, she would all his life be the same to him, 'his own Norah.' She had never written that before—it almost compensated for her leaving. Still, he would have it out with that fool, Dick Tatton, and teach him not to meddle in other people's business, and off he went to find him. Now, Dick Tatton had been from a boy a devoted admirer of Phyllis. So he was not over-fond of Leonard, and was not likely to miss an

opportunity of paying off some of his own wrongs upon his rival.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I have been to Stradbrook, and I have seen Miss Churchill.’

Then it was as Leonard supposed, and Dick was the culprit; so, acting upon this idea, Leonard gave full rein to his tongue. Dick listened silently till Leonard had finished, and then he gave him the full benefit of the reports as to the way in which Miss Churchill was going on at Stradbrook; how she amused her admirers there by recounting the speeches and gestures of the ardent lover she had left behind, until he was a by-word among the officers, one of whom had asked Norah in a loud whisper, meant for Dick’s ear, whether that was ‘Figs’s friend.’

Leonard was speechless with rage, and Dick continued:—

‘Why, while she was here everybody knew that she was only carrying on a game with you. When you weren’t there, Lester Blake was, and she used to write him the most spooony letters. He showed me one where she said how awfully you’d bored her the night before, and how she wished he’d been you.’

‘It’s a lie, from beginning to end!’ roared Leonard. ‘Some infernal plot you’ve hatched amongst you because she

wouldn't take any notice of you fellows.'

'Just as you like,' replied Dick, calmly. 'What you choose to think about her you may; only don't you accuse me of naming your cousin to her. I wouldn't so far insult either of them.'

'Insult them! What do you mean?' exclaimed Leonard.

'Why, I mean this,' replied Dick, preparing to leave, 'that I should insult Phyllis Barton by speaking of her to Norah Churchill, and I should insult Miss Churchill by making her see the difference which, as I consider, lies between her and Miss Barton.'

And before Leonard had time to say another word, Dick had turned, and was walking off in the opposite direction, leaving him to go home in a state of frenzy.

This seemed the climax of all his sufferings; for though he declared he did not believe a syllable of what Dick had said about Lester Blake, nor about the men at Stradbroke, he could not help asking himself, what if it should be true? At any rate he must put an end to the agony he was suffering.

He ended his reflections by walking suddenly up to his father and asking him for a few minutes' conversation. In about

a couple of hours after, when they came out of the room, they both looked pale and dejected. Luke had his arm through his son's. Love for Leonard had gained the victory over Phyllis and family pride, and Luke Barton had given his consent to his son asking Miss Churchill to lay aside her Thespian arts, to retire into private life, and to sit down quietly and spend her future days as the wife of the wealthiest tradesman in a country town, and to enjoy all the honour of being mistress of the Golden Canister.

It was a hard blow for Luke, but he and Lettice agreed that it was of no use to wreck the entire happiness of their lives. Perhaps they had been too proud, and had thought that things were to go on smoothly with them for ever. Now they must try and like this—this young lady—whom Leonard ranked before every one else in the world.

So, without a line to apprise Norah of his visit, Leonard started for Edinburgh, with his parents' consent to his making her his wife, and the promise of an income sufficient to keep them in ease and comfort.

Lettice, when she bade Leonard good-bye, sent her love to Norah, and trusted God would bless them both; and Luke wished his boy every happiness, and hoped

that the wife he had chosen would repay his love by her goodness. Then, when they were left alone, they took tearful counsel how they should tell all this to Phyllis. They knew quite well that, though in every letter she had earnestly pleaded for their consent to Leonard's choice, when the certainty came that all her hope was dead for ever, it must tear open her wounds afresh.

How much Phyllis really suffered none ever knew. Her comfort was that she was far away from loving hearts whose sympathy she could not have borne, and from anxious eyes whose scrutiny she could not have deceived. She bore her grief unaided by human help, and tried to summon up all her better nature to convince herself that she must submit, that a higher will than hers had decreed it. Lettice cried bitterly over the letter the girl sent to them with its enclosure to Leonard; and Luke was not ashamed that his eyes were blinded, and his voice too choked to read the words his brother's child had written to those from whom she seemed so cruelly separated.

Arrived at Edinburgh, Leonard could not feel pleased at the reception he met with from Norah. She tried to be the same to him, but he felt he was boring her

now. She never would have written that last letter to him, but that she supposed they should not meet again, and to use her own words, she intended 'letting the boy easily down.' This coming to Edinburgh after her was too much of a good thing. She hated telling people unpleasant truths, but if Leonard was to go on in this way she should be forced to do so; the worst of people like him was that they always thought you meant everything.

Even Mrs Churchill no longer advocated 'young Barton's' cause. A richer suitor for her daughter's favour had entirely changed the current of that practical woman's ideas. She now advised Norah to put an end to his nonsense by telling him that it was like his impertinence to suppose a lady of her talent and family, and the daughter of a colonel (which was the last rank she had hit upon for the departed Church), would condescend to such as him. But Norah had no idea of disgusting an admirer, and she needed no maternal counsel to get rid of a tiresome lover. Accordingly, when in the morning Leonard came at the hour she had appointed, he was received very much as usual. When, however, after a passionate declaration of his love, he hid his face in her lap, and told her how, before he had

seen her, he had thought he could please his father and mother by marrying his cousin, but that now there was not a woman on earth he would look at but herself, and that he had told his father so, getting his consent and his promise of an income sufficient for him to give his bride a comfortable home, Norah felt she could not help caressing him for so bountifully administering to her vanity. So she told him how dearly she loved him, what happiness it would be for her to live in some sweet secluded cottage where they might be all the world to one another ; but—and as fast as Leonard combated one ‘but’ Norah began another charming sentence, finishing a more incontestable ‘but,’ until Leonard, driven to desperation, seized her hands saying, ‘Norah, don’t give me any more arguments or reasonings : kill me at once, or bid me live, by saying Yes or No to my question.’ Norah, seeing that it was useless to beat about the bush any longer, and knowing that her richer suitor was due in half-an-hour, gave a despairing look into his face, then cast her eyes down after her approved manner on the stage, as if she were resolved upon breaking her own heart, and answered ‘No.’ Leonard called her heartless and cruel, and heaped reproaches upon her, upbraiding her for de-

ceiving him, until, in order to get rid of him, she had to blaze up in her turn, and dare him ever to come into her presence again.

‘You shall be obeyed,’ cried poor Leonard; ‘I will leave Edinburgh this very night, praying I may never hear your name again.’

Norah did not believe him, but Leonard went. He did not go home, however; he could not do that, but he went as far as Carlisle, because nobody knew him there. He wandered about the walls of the old place, not battling against the demons that strove together within him, but rather giving way to them, until he could stay away from the cause of his misery no longer. Perhaps she was suffering as he was now that they were parted. Had she not told him a hundred times that she loved him more than any other man? Oh! she would repent; her profession might be dear to her, but not as dear as he was; and if it was, he would tell her she should continue on the stage, only she must marry him.

So back to Edinburgh he went. The porter at the hotel gave him a couple of letters from home. These he put into his pocket; he could not read them. What did he care for home then, or for anybody but her whose named flared before him on great red and yellow posters—‘Miss Norah



Churchill in "The Love Chase." Constance—Miss Norah Churchill.'

Tired as he was, he wouldn't wait for dinner. How soon he could see his Circe was the absorbing idea; and he at once made for the theatre. The performance had commenced; Norah was on the stage, looking, Leonard thought, more bewitching than ever, and casting continual glances at a part of the house where sat an elderly gentleman, who seemed utterly regardless of the attention his loud applauses were attracting. Leonard screened himself as well as he could, that Norah might not see him. He jealously watched the two, till at last, between the acts, he went out and asked the box-keeper if he knew who that gentleman was, indicating the place he occupied.

'He?' said the man; 'oh, that's Mr Ainslie; he's after Miss Churchill; they do say he's going to marry her, but so I've heard of a good many before.'

Leonard did not stop to hear more. He rushed off determined, as the piece was nearly over, to go to her lodgings and wait and see her once more, and hear from her own lips the truth of this report.

Mrs Churchill was in, the servant said; and, remembering how kind she had always been to him, he determined to interest her

in his behalf. But, to his great surprise, Mrs Churchill's greeting was :

'Now, Mr Barton, I hope you ain't come to bother Norah, because she's had enough of your nonsense.'

Leonard tried to stammer out some reply to this unlooked-for speech.

'I dare say you mean well, and we've always treated you as a gentleman, but you can't think that I ever supposed you expected Miss Churchill would marry you.'

'Why,' replied Leonard, aghast, 'you told me yourself you hoped she would.'

'Bless the man, what will he say next !' exclaimed Mrs Churchill, with well-feigned indignation. 'Why, Mr Barton, you must be mad to say such a thing. Without wishing to hurt your feelings, I must say. I have much higher expectations for my daughter than anything you could offer her. I may as well be plain with you, and tell you that she will very shortly be married to a gentleman who has his thousands a-year and keeps his carriage, and who will restore her to the position which she was born to, only her dear papa's unfortunate death obliged us for a time to forego it.'

'I don't, I won't believe it !' groaned poor Leonard. 'You are forcing her into

it; you are deceiving me; it's false, I feel it is!

'Well, I'm sure, that's pretty well,' returned Mrs Churchill, nettled by the doubt she considered thrown upon her assertions. 'I could show you a note of his, in which he tells her of his always thinking about her, morning, noon, and night; and asks her if she's heard anything of young Spoony, meaning you, yet.'

'Then, in mercy's name, show it to me, Mrs Churchill, and I will swear never to come near her again.'

Mrs Churchill hesitated: supposing Mr Ainslie should come home with Norah, and should meet this desperate young man—for she could see he was desperate—a pretty fuss there'd be; so she asked him—

'Well, would you go as soon as you'd read it?'

'Yes.'

'And not come back or be hanging about Norah again?'

'Yes.'

Mrs Churchill went to a box and took out a letter, which she watched Leonard reading, without a word of comment; she saw him fold it up and put it into his pocket.

‘Oh! but, Mr Barton, you must not keep it; what should I say to Norah?’

But Leonard paid no attention. He did not seem to see or hear her, as he mechanically looked round for his hat, put it on, and walked out of the room. Vainly did Mrs Churchill follow him, call to him, run to the door after him. Leonard paid not the smallest heed to her or anybody else until he crossed into the next street, where he ran almost against Norah, hanging upon Mr Ainslie’s arm, and smiling up into his face. Then a great rush of bitter hatred came into his heart, and as he passed her he hissed out the words that rose to his lips. Mr Ainslie said to Norah, ‘Did that man speak to you?’

Norah, all surprised as she was, had to steady her voice to answer, ‘No.’

And so Leonard Barton’s eyes were opened to the fact that he had been duped, cheated, laughed at,—his devotion made the subject of merriment, and his love the scoff of Miss Churchill’s numerous followers. This last thought, more effectually than anything else, quenched his passion, for no man’s affection can continue for a woman who holds him up to ridicule. Leonard hated her; loathed himself for having forgotten every other tie for her, and felt that he could not return home

and face the pity of his father and mother, and the sneers and laughter of his friends. He longed to be amongst strangers, people who knew nothing of him and his story. He wrote an incoherent scribble to his father, saying that he was not going to marry Miss Churchill,—the reason why he could not explain to them. He should not return home, and they could not wish the return of one who had proved himself so unmindful of their love. He intended to get something to do by which he might earn some money and no longer be a burden to them. He would write from time to time, so that they must not be anxious on his account. All this was mixed up with reproaches upon himself for what had passed, despair for the future, and a general tone of not-caring-what-became-of-him, which filled Luke and Lettice with the most distracting fears. They wrote by return of post, urgently entreating him to come back; but there came no answer, until the poor mother was nearly beside herself with the agony of picturing the horrors that might have happened to her darling.

Phyllis returned home. All pride was laid aside, and not a single person in the town but sympathized in the distress at the Golden Canister. Everybody wrote

to everybody at a distance, giving a full and particular description of Leonard Barton, and telling of his being absent, and urging that, if he should be met with, he should be told that the old people were breaking their hearts on his account, and that his mother would surely die.

Three months went by, and then came a letter saying that Leonard was in London. He was quite well now, but he had been ill, or he would have written before. He was longing to hear from home; if they had not quite forgotten their ungrateful son, would they send a line to 'Leonard B., Charing Cross Post-office?'

Send a line to him! why, they would all have sent themselves to urge him to return, and to tell him how dearly they loved him, and how his only fault had been in staying away. Luke, without saying a word, enclosed a cheque in his letter, and Lettice put a five-pound note in hers, fearing that he might be pushed for money. Then Luke wondered whether he had a situation, and Lettice wondered what had been the matter with him, and their thankful hearts, rejoicing over their dear one's safety, forgot the misery his absence had caused them, and earnestly hoped that he would listen to their entreaties, and return home to them again.

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And Leonard, not in the spirit of listening to their entreaties, but with great thankfulness that he had still that dear spot to go back to, returned—but returned so altered externally that when his father and mother saw him they could not believe that the wan invalid, feebly trying to hasten towards them, could be their Leonard; that the shaven head, sunken eyes, and thin limbs that tottered under him could belong to their once so handsome, stalwart son. Oh, what had caused this change? A fever, Leonard said; but he did not tell them then, nor for long afterwards, all the sufferings he had endured: how, after he left Edinburgh, he had gone straight to London, proposing to live upon the money he had with him until he should obtain some situation—a comparatively easy task he, in his country ignorance, thought: but week after week passed by, and he had met with nothing but disappointments. Pride forbade him writing home and asking for more money; so he denied himself everything he possibly could, until he half-starved himself. This, together with his excited state of mind and anxiety, reduced his bodily condition; one neglected cold upon another ended at length in feverish symptoms, to which he would not yield. But at length

he was beyond speaking or moving, or making any resistance to the landlady's taking him (for want of knowing what better to do with him) to the nearest hospital. There was nothing to show to whom he belonged. Before evening he was in a state of delirium. And so the petted darling of Luke and Lettice Barton, the pride of the Golden Canister, and the man who filled fair Phyllis's heart with despairing love, lay struggling for life in the bed of a hospital ward, attended by hired nurses, who wondered if he had any belongings, and, if so, how they could thus leave the poor fellow to strangers.

When he was recovering Leonard's pride rebelled against his asking any one about the hospital to write to his parents, fearing that it might in some way get to the ears of his native town. The day he wrote his letter home was the day he was discharged, still miserably weak and nervous, and with only a few shillings in his pocket.

Well might the tears, which none of them pretended to notice, steal down his thin cheeks as he found himself once more surrounded by the atmosphere of love, and well might his heart send up a thanksgiving for that love upon which only a short time before he had set so little store.



Leonard was a long time in getting well, and had he been a hero suffering from wounds gained in some glorious cause, Lettice and Phyllis could not have made more fuss over him. He had been ill once before, and the two women often spoke together of the difference that had come over him.

Hard experience had taught Leonard the true value of great, unselfish love. Daily now he thanked God for the blessings he had before taken as his right. He thought now how little he had appreciated the devotion of his father and mother, and how utterly unworthy he had been of it and of the love of Phyllis—his dear cousin—yes, she would never be anything but his cousin now. He could see the alteration in her manner; she was kind and forbearing to him, but in her heart she despised him. And no wonder; for what a blind idiot he had been! He had always thought her pretty, but now he could watch her by the hour, and would often pretend to be asleep that she might occupy herself so fully as not to observe his fixed gaze. He had never noticed how other men admired her, but now he firmly believed that all the friends who came to see him were secretly in love with her. He could hardly help pushing her away

when she would at night put her lips to his forehead, saying, 'Good-night, dear cousin.' She had never offered him such a salutation in days gone by, and had never called him cousin—a name she was always thrusting upon him now.

So Leonard was vexed and tormented, while Phyllis daily schooled herself by saying that Leonard was getting stronger, and that in time he would choose a wife whom she would love as a sister; and that when her uncle and aunt were dead, and she was no more wanted about the old place, she must try and do some good in the world, and not sink into a complaining old maid. The thought of ever marrying any one else never occurred to her now. She had given Leonard all her love, and she had none left for any other man.

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### III.

By the time the first June roses came, Leonard was strong and well again. But he was so altered and sobered—so much more anxious to save his father any care, so tenderly watchful over every want his mother had, that everybody felt the differ-

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ence. The slightly overbearing tone was gone. He no more chafed under the slightest contradiction, and though this alteration endeared him to all he came in contact with, those who loved him most would willingly have suffered from his old manner, rather than see a change which they feared was the result of disappointed hopes and a broken spirit.

Phyllis used to think his diffidence and constraint to her resulted from the fear lest she might not understand that they could never occupy the old footing towards each other. So to put him at his ease, and because a little sore pride would rise up in her heart, she used to take particular notice of Dick Tatton, and receive all his attentions, thereby driving Leonard to further despair, for, inconsistent as it seemed, Leonard was now thoroughly in love with the girl whom he had sworn he would never ask to be his wife. Daily he contrasted her with Norah Churchill, and asked himself what demon had possessed him to throw away his life's happiness. Oh! it was all over for ever. Phyllis must see what he felt for her, and her pointed acceptance of Dick Tatton's attentions was intended to rebuke his presumption in daring now to think of her.

The summer roses bloomed and faded,

and the golden corn ripened and was cut down, the leaves that were budding when Leonard Barton returned home began to fall and wither, as his hopes seemed to do day by day, until he could endure his state no longer. One day when Lettice, with loving solicitude, had been trying to dispel his depression, she summoned up courage enough to speak of Norah. Leonard broke out in a storm of rage at her name, cursing the day he first saw her, and calling himself a dolt and an idiot, until it dawned upon Lettice that her prayer had been answered, and that Leonard loved Phyllis again. But nothing would induce him to speak to her. He was certain she intended marrying Dick Tatton. Why, she loved the man, and showed that she did—he saw it; of course she couldn't deceive him.

For a whole week Lettice pondered over what she had best do. In her heart she believed that Phyllis loved Leonard. Still appearances were in favour of Dick Tatton, and at last she resolved to sound her niece, who at once told her that Dick had had his answer long ago. Only they agreed that, as neither of them ever intended to marry, they should be great friends all their lives. This was good news, indeed; but when Lettice went on to speak of Leonard, Phyllis would not

listen. No, whatever *he* said was not from love, but from pity. She would go away in order that Leonard might feel himself free to choose a suitable wife, which fear of disappointing them alone prevented him from doing. Lettice was in despair. How could she bring these two together? At length, Phyllis said, 'There is but one way in which I could be convinced. Let me overhear you tell this to Leonard, aunt; and give me your sacred promise that he shall not know I am in the room. It seems a dishonourable plan, but as the happiness of two lives is at stake it may be forgiven.'

So Lettice promised, and the next evening the scheme was carried out. Phyllis, hidden from sight by the curtains, and seated upon the deep old-fashioned window-seat of her aunt's room, listened with excited fear to the conversation which now seemed the turning-point in her existence.

Lettice told her son of Phyllis's refusal of Dick Tatton's offer, and that now he might surely take courage to speak to her. But no, Leonard was all despair. He knew, he was sure, that Phyllis cared for Dick, only she was so unselfish, that rather than pain her uncle and aunt, perhaps him too—for of course she must see how he loved her now,—she would sacrifice herself.

‘But she sha’n’t do that, mother,’ he broke out. ‘She shall see I am not the selfish fellow I was. I will go away for a time, and then she’ll be different, and when she is, I shall try and come back again.’

‘But, my dear,’ said Lettice pettishly, ‘you are talking nonsense. Phyllis as much as told me she still loved you.’

‘Yes, mother; and do you think if she really did love me she would have told you? Never. No, mother, I threw the chance away when I might have had it. I did not think her anything in comparison with a woman whose business it was to cheat; and now my punishment is to value what I have cast away, and to feel I am eating my heart out for love of the girl whom I swore in my madness never to ask to be my wife.’ And Leonard, in his misery, bowed his head upon the table, and hid his face.

Then Lettice stole quietly out of the room, and Leonard felt a soft cheek pressed against his hand, and looking up his eyes met Phyllis’s, who said with trembling voice—

‘Then, Leonard, must I ask you to take me?’

Let us leave them there, while we shake our heads pityingly over Phyllis’s want of proper pride.

‘Fancy!’ says some fair girl, who reigns supreme over her slaves; ‘after a man had treated you like that, *asking* him to marry you!’

‘A mean-spirited creature, and highly improper!’ exclaims the strong-minded young lady, living in an atmosphere far above love and its joys and sorrows.

‘I’d have served him out!’ declares the happy bride, whose word is law to a devoted husband.

Perhaps all these speak truly from their hearts,—hearts that never were tried as sorely as poor Phyllis’s had been.

A due amount of proper pride, and indignation, and desire to avenge our wrongs are all very good things, and Phyllis Barton had felt all these to the full; and then she proved a truth in human nature—that all these feelings have their limits, and in time die out; but that the one love of a pure unselfish heart has no limit, and endures unto the end.

Phyllis’s reward was in Leonard’s life, which was devoted to her. He believed she had no equal, and declared that to her alone he owed the happiness which daily grew more perfect. Lettice and Luke seemed to grow young again in the joyful realization of their wishes. There was no

further delay. Leonard and Phyllis were married as soon as it was possible, and again love, peace, and good-will reigned at the sign of the Golden Canister.

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## PETER TROTMAN.

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MY name is Trotman,—Mr Peter Trotman,—Peter Trotman, Esq., for my godmother, besides giving me the name of Peter at my baptism, and a silver knife, fork, and spoon during her lifetime, made me at her death her sole heir to £20,000, in token, I suppose, of the estimation in which she held a man who for forty-eight years could withstand ‘that wily sex,’ and follow her example of remaining in single blessedness. I wonder whether the money would have been mine had she known that this single state was the result of my misfortunes, not my wishes; had she been acquainted with all the miseries I had endured, the hopes I had entertained, and the crushing disappointments I had met with, while pursuing the

tender passion. Really my woes would fill a three-volume novel of the present day. Seldom, in any work of fiction, have I come upon a hero who tried so hard to meet with a kindred spirit, and had been so doomed to see his warmest affections either nipped in the bud or crushed in maturer blossom.

It was my misfortune not merely to be an only son, but the only boy in the distinguished family of Trotman. I fear it was due to this fact that I was so unmistakably coddled. When at school, if the weather was at all doubtful, Lydia arrived with Master Peter's thick boots, cloak, and umbrella. If I attempted to run or jump, like my school-fellows, some aunt or cousin was sure to see me, and be certain that I should over-exert myself. If I showed in my temper any signs of the 'old Adam,' Dr Marston was sent for, and 'the dear boy was feverish.' If I didn't eat, my mother was in despair,—'The dear boy hadn't the slightest appetite.' If I did eat, she was sure I was far from well—I had 'such an unnatural craving for food.'

I had two sisters older than myself, but Caroline and Lavinia, when girls, would never have dreamed of disputing my right to lord it over them. At home with my own family, I was certainly 'monarch of

all I surveyed.' But see me at a picnic, a party, or a gathering of any kind, and all the 'lord of the creation' died straight out of me, leaving me more self-conscious and bashful than the youngest miss there. Whenever I was addressed, all my colour seemed ready to mount to the roots of my hair; my arms and legs were continually in my way or in somebody else's; the girls at my approach laughed openly or covertly, as their dispositions prompted; the young men of my own age treated me with an indifference that bordered on contempt; while small fiends in jackets, numbering years from nine to thirteen, openly patronized me and announced my blushing weakness to the world. If people had let me alone, I do not know that I should have been more awkward than other young men; but I never attempted to convey a glass of wine or cup of tea to the object of my secret but ardent passion, without a warning from some *kind* voice, 'Don't upset it, Peter!' 'Be careful, Peter!' and straight-way one half of it was on the carpet, or over my trousers! And if it chanced to be hot tea, that was surely trying enough, without the torture of hearing the girls giggle and the boys burst into a loud 'Ha! ha!' How often have I returned boiling with vexation, and determined never to

leave home again, never to endure the purgatory of another friendly party!

From the age of fourteen I was continually in love, but my first serious attachment was when I was twenty, and had just entered my situation as a clerk in the Bank of England—a situation not congenial to my taste, but provided for me as being genteel and easy for a delicate constitution, although, to speak the truth, I was as healthy as a farm boy. The hours, too, were regular, because it would never have done for me to be getting my dinner at all hours, for I had no appetite (I could have eaten a donkey and digested it too). The family always had united in coddling me both as a child and as a boy, and they carried it into manhood. I said my vocation did not agree with my taste. No; for in spite of my beardless face and bashful manners, I was fired with military ardour, and longed to be a 'soldier bold,' who would never tire of 'war's alarms.' My delight was to read of hairbreadth escapes by 'flood and field,' of corsairs and brigands; and the lovely creatures who were always devoted to these (I can now only call them ruffians) in my imagination took the form of the Matilda, Julia, Fanny, or whoever's image at that moment filled my breast.

Years rolled on; my sisters married; my dear fond old father and mother died; my aunts and uncles dropped off; and at length I found myself at forty-eight a very lonely old bachelor, with a feeling that I had nobody to care for, and that there was nobody to care for me,—that the attentions I received were not for myself, but on account of the £20,000 my childless old godmother had left me, and which my friends (who continually asked me to stand sponsor for their children) hoped a childless old godfather would in due time leave to them. I used to sit in my dingy old dining-room after my lonely dinner, and wonder why it had not been my fate to have a bright face opposite me. I used to think of the men I had known with wives and families; and though I was aware that several had had hard battles to fight with the world, and many a trial to undergo, I (in spite of being what they termed 'a lucky dog of a bachelor with £20,000 to call his own') would willingly have taken my share in trial and misfortune rather than have experienced the isolated feeling I carried about with me.

I began to feel that I was too old to inspire any woman with affection for me. And if at any time a nice unaffected girl showed interest in my conversation, or

pleasure in my attentions, my sisters called her bold and forward, and considered it a great liberty to take with a man 'of my time of life.' I often felt a little annoyed with Caroline and Lavinia for seeking to impress my age so much upon me. If I went to see either of them they would parade their solicitude and attention before everybody, until I was ungrateful enough to feel quite annoyed. From Caroline, it would be, 'Peter, my dear, are your boots thick, because a cold at our time of life is serious?' Or from Lavinia, as she brought out a great piece of cotton wool, 'Now, Peter, stuff your ears; we are none of us getting younger, my dear, and deafness comes on very suddenly at our time of life.' If I had a pain anywhere, it was the gout flying about me, and though I was as healthy as any man could be, I was made to appear a complete valetudinarian. I had no pleasure in going to see either of them, for I was always regaled by Caroline with all the faults of Lavinia,—the disagreeable bad habits of her children, and the selfish bear she had for a husband; if I went to see Lavinia, the very same remarks were made upon Caroline and her belongings. They were so jealous of each other that I dared not give one a present but the other must have

a similar gift. No scolding wife ever played the tyrant over a yielding husband more completely than did my sisters over me. Sometimes, goaded to an unwonted state of anger, I would confide my injuries to Bridget, my old housekeeper, and she would soothe my ruffled temper by loading the whole of my relations with such a burden of misdemeanours, that I forgot my injuries in taking up the cudgels on their behalf. And when I had beaten Bridget into a corner, she would throw her last shaft at me, and say, 'Well, Mr Peter, it serves you right; you ought to be married, and have some lady to tease you and please you at home. "Too old!" you're "never too old to mend; remember old age is honourable,—but old bachelors is abominable."'

With this poetical quotation Bridget would leave me to my own reflections, and not pleasant ones either. What was the use of everybody saying the same thing? All my acquaintances declared it was a shame that I was not married. I agreed with them, but the shame was not mine. I had asked, at various times of my life, four separate young ladies to be Mrs Peter Trotman. The first burst into a fit of laughter; the second never understood that I had proposed to her; the third, I

believe, was sorry for me, but she was already engaged; and the fourth, when she learned my income, wondered at my effrontery. True, since I had possessed the £20,000, I had never asked the hand of any one, because I wanted the heart too, and even £20,000 could not buy that.

In the autumn of last year my loneliness seemed to have gained its climax. My only remaining bachelor friend got married, and left me without any one to take my summer tour with, to drop in upon and smoke a cigar with, or accompany on a day's excursion. I felt more desolate than ever. Lavinia and Caroline declared it was disgusting in a man of Thompson's age to marry (he was forty-nine); that he must know it was only for his money (he had £300 a-year); and that he would live to rue it.

Christmas drew nigh: I dared not stay in town, for my sisters were not on friendly terms, and if I went to dine with one I should never spend a peaceful hour again with the other. Again, if I dined with neither, they would combine in bewailing my want of affection, and in abusing the friend of whose hospitality I had partaken. So I made up my mind to accept an invitation from an old chum, who had recently obtained the management of the

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Bank at Smarden, in Dorsetshire. Sometimes I quite regretted my good old god-mother's bequest, for when I was a bank clerk, with £250 a-year, I *could* do as I liked, at least people didn't much care whether I came or not. But now, if I ventured to refuse an invitation, I received such pathetic appeals to our 'old and valued friendship,' that, rather than incur such another moving epistle, I inconvenienced myself, and often went out when I would rather have stayed at home.

As the day drew near on which I was expected at Smarden I heartily wished I had not accepted the invitation, for it was unusually cold, and each day threatened a fall of snow. It was Bridget's advice that I should go to Weymouth, sleep there, and go on the next day. Upon this advice I acted, and as I did not wish to arrive too early at my friend's house, I thought it would be better to have my dinner at the comfortable hotel I put up at in Weymouth, and then I should reach Smarden about seven, in time for a nice country tea. So four o'clock found me comfortably seated in a comfortable carriage, with three or four other passengers. But, alas for our hopes of arriving at Smarden at seven o'clock! In the first place, we did not start for an hour, as we

had to wait for an excursion train from London, to join our already enormous string of carriages. Then, every five minutes there was a station, and I suppose each person in the village received a parcel, packed under a system peculiar to that line, —viz. that the last packed were the last delivered, and consequently the first deliveries were under all the rest. Then there was such a shaking of hands between the guards and the station-masters, between the travellers getting out and those who remained behind, that I began to resign myself to the idea of being quite given up by my friends, and of spending the night at the Smarden Station, or perhaps in the carriage I was in,—the latter not a bad idea, for I was tolerably warm and comfortable, as well as very sleepy. This was my last impression. The next thing I heard was, ‘Smarden, Smarden!’ Why, I had been dreaming that I had reached my journey’s end, and here we were! Dear bless my heart, the train was moving on. I jumped up, opened the door, and hallooed to the porter, when I was caught hold of by somebody, who said, ‘What place did he say?’ ‘Smarden,’ I answered. ‘Why, I am going there; don’t let the train go on,—I must get out.’ ‘Then you’d better look sharp, ma’am,’ said the

porter, who had just come up. In a moment I, with my portmanteau, and a lady, with some bundles and bandboxes, were standing breathless on the platform, looking at the train disappearing. I turned to the porter to ask him if he would get me a fly.

‘A fly!’ he repeated; ‘why, ain’t you got nothing to meet you? You won’t get no flies here; you should have gone on to Smarden.’

Before I had time to answer—before I could get another opportunity of speaking, my lady companion had discovered, by a string of exclamations and questions, that the station was the one before Smarden,—that I had been mistaken, and that she and I were left at Dilcott, ten miles from our destination, without any means of being accommodated for the night, and no conveyance of any kind to be obtained. At length, driven to madness by hearing her declare that my mistake was a shameful trick; that she would have me before the magistrates; that she would report the guard for putting her into a carriage with an abominable person, who played off drunken tricks on respectable people; I could stand it no longer. So, louder than I ever spoke before, I now demanded of the porter if he had not called Smarden?

I did not deny that I was asleep, but I was sure that I was aroused by the word Smarden, and that I distinctly heard him repeat it three times.'

'Well, la! I dare say you did, 'cause you see Squire Bond gived his dinner to-day, and I didn't want none of them farming chaps left here, so as it was the last train, I woke 'em up by calling, "Any more for Smarden?" and I dare say I did finish up with Smarden two or three times,—so would you, too, if you'd got to holler much after such a day as I've had.'

I turned to the lady, 'Now, madam, you see how you misjudge me by calling a mistake arising from this man's senseless folly, a drunken trick of mine.' I felt my temper rising, and continued, 'and I would beg to inform you, madam, that, however unfortunate this accident is, I am a respectable person from London.'

'London, indeed!' she retorted angrily, 'I don't think any the better of you for that. You may be a respectable man, but you're an uncommonly senseless one, to go bundling out of a train, and persuading a lady alone to act as foolishly.'

Then, as a sense of her unfortunate condition dawned upon her, she burst into a flood of tears, which quite broke down

all my hot anger, and filled me with annoyance at myself and compassion for her.

‘My dear madam,’ I said.

‘Don’t “dear madam” me, sir,’ she sobbed. ‘Oh! what shall I do, left behind at this hour alone? My poor Susan will think I am killed.’

‘Don’t take on so, ma’am,’ said the porter; ‘where might you be going to? Come into the station. I’ll unlock the waiting-room, and we’ll see what can be done.’ So clinging to the porter, the poor lady suffered herself to be conducted in, I following, crestfallen and laden with her packages.

When we were in the room I found my fellow-traveller was thin and sharp-featured, between fifty and sixty years of age, with a something about her that proclaimed her at once a maiden lady; and in that dreadful room (is there anything so forlorn-looking as a waiting-room at night in winter, without a fire and with only one gaslight?) we sat down to discuss what was to be done.

‘And where are *you* going to, sir?’ demanded the porter.

‘Smarden; but never mind me,’ I said, ‘this lady is my first concern: for, madam,’ I said, turning to her, ‘the only way I can at all atone for the inconvenience I have put you to, is by en-

deavouring to convey you home as soon as possible.' Then I began questioning the porter, and from his answers I found we were two miles from the village. When we got there, there was no inn. There was 'The Jolly Waggoner;' but the very name sent a thrill of agony through the poor lady.

'No! they had no flies.'

'Well, there's Huckstable's cart,' continued the porter, 'he might do it, but Smarden Regis (where the lady wants to go) is good six miles from Smarden.'

All at once a brilliant idea struck him: Squire Bond was going to send for his parcels, and Joinings was in the way of Smarden Regis; he knew the man wasn't to 'deliver 'em at big house' till morning; for something handsome *he* might be induced to take us.

I consulted the lady, who, being quite hysterical, rather perplexed me by appealing to my feelings if my own wife were in such circumstances.

'All I can say, madam, is, that if she were (for I could not of course explain that I had no wife) I could only hope she would be with some one who felt as sorry for his misfortune and as anxious for her comfort as I do for yours. I shall not leave you until I see you safe, and there is my card,

madam, to show you that I—I am no impostor, and am on my way to visit my friend Mr Jennings, the manager of the County Bank.

This somewhat soothed my companion. She put on her glasses and read Jennings' letter, which I handed to her. She said she knew Mr Jennings, was satisfied now that I was a gentleman, and begged pardon for any detrimental or personal remarks she might have made, although she hoped I would not overlook the dreadful dilemma she was placed in. Then the tears began to flow afresh.

Our friend the porter turned out to be a most energetic, praiseworthy man, and full of resources. He suggested that perhaps I had 'a little spirits' with me which would revive the lady. And I really had such, for not being sure that in this rural atmosphere I should not find a pervading taste for everything British, I had provided myself with a small bottle of Cognac, in case of mince pies and such like disagreeing with me. He made some water hot, and in spite of the poor lady's declarations that she could not think of it, as she was not accustomed to any stimulant but sal volatile, we made her take some, and she certainly felt better after it.

It was past eleven o'clock before the

cart arrived. The driver excused himself for the late hour, and interested the porter at once by telling him of his having met one Simmons at the 'Jolly Waggoner.' 'And the first words he says was, "Where's old Dawe?" he says.' This question seemed to be a joke of the highest order, and quite restored the porter's good humour; so, after some considering and debating I made an offer, and was declared to have 'done the thing handsome.' Dear me! I can see the scene now—the dark night, the cart (a very rustic affair, without springs), with the driver standing at the horse's head, holding his lantern; the porter running to and fro, piling up the parcels and packages in order to make our seats as comfortable as possible,—encouraging the poor lady, encouraging me, and ever and anon asking questions about his friend Simmons, and letting a chorus run through it all of 'So he asked after old Dawe, did he?'

At last we were ready, and my companion was kept from lamenting aloud by her attention being drawn to the comforts by which she was surrounded. 'There, ma'am, that'll do for a footstool, and there's a back like a easy-chair. Now, let me tuck in this rug snug all round you, shut your eyes, and you'll think you're in your own feather-bed.'



I felt quite sorry to part with the man. He had done his best to help me through my difficulties, and, being a poor hand at words, I tried to express my gratitude in the 'current coin of the realm.' And I think I succeeded, for he told me he should drink my health, and make his old woman do so too; and 'I wish you a safe journey, sir; he'll drive you safe, sir, and take care of you, sir;' and as we rattled off I could hear him calling, 'When you come this way again, ask for Dawe, sir. Good luck to you, sir.' And one of those good spirits, who float about the air, no doubt heard the wish from the honest heart, and catching up the words flew before me, singing, 'Good luck to you, good luck to you.'

I need not describe the drive, how my poor companion complained, and bemoaned, and cried, and fidgeted. She had good cause too, for my teeth chattered and an icicle hung to my nose; my legs, too, were cramped,—through my having no rug but only a piece of a carpet-bag, and the end of a hard package to sit upon,—long before we drew up in front of a cottage from a window of which a light shone. To my great delight, she said she lived there, and before another word could be uttered a door flew open, disclosing light and warmth within. Somebody ran out, and cried,

‘Aunt Ann, is it you? Are you all right? I’m so glad. I have been frightened to death about you.’ I really don’t know how we all got out, but we found ourselves in a little parlour, before a blazing fire, my poor lady’s tears flowing faster than ever as she recounted all the misery she had gone through.

‘Well, it’s all over now, Aunt Ann; don’t give way.’

‘Give way, Susan! you don’t know what I’ve endured. I shall never survive this drive in the depth of winter.’

But her niece only kissed her, took off her things, and never stopped until she had made her quite comfortable. Then she wheeled her nearer the fire, and said in the same cheery voice, ‘Now, auntie, you shall thaw a bit.’ Turning to me, she said, ‘I must look after you now, sir. We have been forgetting you;’ and I was obliged to submit to be waited upon and have my coat helped off and my wraps undone, as well as to be drawn nearer the fire. By this time the aunt had recovered herself sufficiently to tell the story of our adventure, and as I insisted upon blaming myself, she somewhat excused me, and dwelt upon my attentions, adding, ‘Susan, my dear, this gentleman was on his way to spend a little time with Mr Jennings of

the bank at Smarden, but he insisted on seeing me safe here. I am sure I do not know how he will reach Mr Jennings' house.'

'Well, auntie, we will see about that to-morrow; fortunately we have a spare room, and, after resting,' addressing me, 'you may be able to find something to take you to the Laurels, for Mr Jennings, you know, does not live at the Bank. His house is three miles on the other side of Smarden.'

I hesitated, hardly knowing what to do. Our driver must return at once. He could not take me to Smarden. There was no inn near, and I could not attempt to find my way to a place I knew nothing about. Still, I did not like to encroach on the hospitality of these ladies, which humanity alone prompted them to offer. In a moment, I was rescued from the difficulty of my situation by Miss Susan, who said, 'I see we all feel a little awkward, so let us introduce ourselves to each other. This is Miss Frampton, the mistress of Home Cottage, and my aunt. I am Susan Frampton. We are two maiden ladies, living alone, and therefore we have not often the pleasure of entertaining gentlemen visitors.'

She paused, and I continued, 'My

name is Peter Trotman. I am a bachelor, and live in Fitzroy Square, London. If you and your aunt will permit me, I shall gratefully accept your invitation to remain.'

'Now,' continued Miss Susan, 'we must all shake hands, and consider ourselves friends.' And then I saw that though this young lady (she looked about twenty-five) was not pretty, she had one of the sweetest faces I had ever seen, and her manners were so unaffected, and her voice so sweet, that it was a pleasure to hear her talk and a pleasure to look at her while you talked to her. Somehow, after I had left that bright little room, and thought of that bright little face and dainty figure moving about so quickly and quietly, seeing what you wanted before you even knew it yourself, I gave a sigh, and wished somebody would take off my £20,000, and twenty years of my age. Then, quoting Bridget, I said, 'There's no fool like an old fool,' and with this wise reflection, I fell asleep. When I awoke the snow was falling so thick and fast that I could see nothing beyond the tree near my window. I thought with dismay of my friend Jennings, and wondered how I was ever to reach the Laurels. It really was vexatious

to feel myself intruding upon people to whom I was a stranger. So, in rather a gloomy frame of mind, I descended the stairs into the little parlour.

‘Good-morning; did you sleep well?’ and putting out her hand Miss Susan shakes mine cordially. Where now was the gloom? Gone, vanished in that instant, and instead, I thought what a lucky fellow I was.

‘You and I are to have breakfast alone,’ says this bright little fairy; ‘for I would not let Aunt Ann get up. She is rather stiff, poor thing, after her last night’s jolting.’

Unless you are a solitary being, eating your breakfast as quickly as you can, not in the best of spirits or tempers, with nobody to say a word to, nothing to look at but your newspaper and your gloomy old dining-room, you cannot enter into my delight at finding myself sitting at that little table, in the cheerful room, beside the bright fire, and opposite to me a smiling face. Yes, I *must* eat my breakfast, or I shall fall on my knees before her and beg her to keep me here, and never send me back to the dreary house I had left in Fitzroy Square. Dear me! I could dwell on every occurrence of that eventful day, for I never reached THE LAURELS,

and it was not until the following morning that I took my departure from Home Cottage, and even then it was with a promise that I should call and inquire after Aunt Ann's cold before I left for London.

Of course my adventure caused much merriment to my friend Jennings and his family. From them I heard that Miss Frampton was the late doctor's sister; that Susan was his only child; that he had not been able to leave them much; and that Susan added to their income by teaching the Rector's children.

'She is one of the nicest girls I know,' added Mrs Jennings, 'and the man who marries her will get a treasure.'

With a very hesitating voice I asked if the treasure had yet been secured, and was answered 'No, for she had never got a chance of seeing anybody. But,' turning to her husband, 'really, John, it would only be polite to ask her here, after their kindness to Mr Trotman as your friend' (what a delightful woman I thought her!). 'Suppose we ask Miss Frampton and Susan to spend a few days with us during Mr Trotman's visit, it would seem neighbourly. So the invitation was sent and accepted, and on the day fixed I went to fetch the two ladies. The little Jen-

ningses were to have a children's party that night, and for the first time in my life I found myself appealed to, in order to decide which would look best, scarlet or pink roses; whether the holly should remain, or be pulled into little sprigs for a new device. All the afternoon I was hammering and tying and nailing up decorations. It was 'Mr Trotman, *do* help me to fix this,' and up I mounted the steps, and hammered away. Before I had finished another voice would say, 'Wait till Mr Trotman comes, he'll manage it.' My excitement rose every minute. I never felt of such importance in my life, and four o'clock found me with my coat off and Mary Jennings and Susan with their frocks tucked up, polishing the floor with French chalk and bees'-wax. We had to run away and dress. In the evening I was quite a master of the ceremonies, leading off the country dances, crying the forfeits, kissing the girls under the mistle-toe, until I had to acknowledge to myself that I never before really knew what I had in me. All my bashfulness had vanished, and I felt twenty years younger. Fancy me, Peter Trotman, hearing, 'Well, we all ought to give a vote of thanks to Mr Trotman, for he has been the very life of the party.' Why, my heart felt as

light as a feather, and I could have hugged the speaker, 'good Mrs Jennings, before her husband and her family.

That night I resolved I would make my last venture for happiness, by asking one woman more to be my wife. And if she said 'No,' why then I must accept my fate, and leave her my money. But I hugged the thought that most likely she wasn't aware I had any money. At all events her first kindness had been shown when she did not know that I possessed a penny.

Before my visit was out I had won my prize. Susan said 'Yes;' and I know now, that in spite of the twenty years between us, it was yes to my heart, yes to my love, as truly as to my hand and name. It was settled that we were to be married in the spring. I told no one of my good fortune, but all my friends complimented me on my improved appearance; and I could even laugh when Caroline told me she feared 'I was not so well as I looked,' and Lavinia felt 'that such spirits at my time of life were always forced.' Bridget alone knew of my good fortune, and the good old soul rejoiced over it, and said she should only stop to give up the keys and show 'the young missis' the



store of house-linen and china, untouched since my godmother's days.

The spring seemed long in coming, but at length, in the 'merry month of May,' there was a quiet wedding at Smarden Regis, and amidst a shower of tears, kisses, and old shoes, Susan and I left in the approved fashion 'for the Continent.' I wanted to show her the beauties of the Rhine, everything foreign being new to this little country girl, who had never been beyond Weymouth in her life. I did not wonder now at ladies liking shopping, for I thought that going with Susan to buy a bonnet in Paris was one of the most pleasant recreations I had ever known. I wanted her to buy a dozen bonnets, each one she tried on seeming to suit her better than the last; and the good-tempered madame hinted that she wished all the monsieurs would take pattern by me.

We returned home to Fitzroy Square, and really I had no idea that that murky dwelling could have become such a cheerful abode. After a few days I confessed to Susan that I had never informed my two sisters of my intended marriage, and that until they had read the intimation in the newspapers, and received the note which

accompanied the wedge of cake Susan had sent to the children, they had no idea of my intentions. Neither of them having written to me, I feel doubtful as to how they meant to behave.

‘Well!’ said Susan, ‘the best way is to take it for granted that they mean to behave kindly. So we will not stand on ceremony, but to-day you shall take me to see them.’

I must say, that after I had knocked at Caroline’s door, I never felt any inclination stronger than to call a cab, jump into it with Susan, and so avoid the encounter I foresaw was inevitable. But as I furtively glanced at her, she was standing so self-possessed and unconscious (though as she has since told me she was shaking with nervousness), that I made an effort to recover myself and ask the dolorous attendant if Mrs Simpson was at home.

‘Oh yes, she is,’ answered the maid in a tone which implied that I was fortunate in having arrived before she sunk under the load of trouble which I had caused her. Ah! thought I, now for it. I see the household has been made to groan under the recent family affliction. We were shown up into the drawing-room, compared to which the one in Fitzroy

Square was a 'hall of dazzling light.' All the blinds were drawn down, so that no ray of sun might enter. Often as I had seen the room, the arrangement had never before filled me with such an air of unhome-like discomfort. Though it was summer, I felt quite chilly. At length there was a rustle, and Caroline and her three dreadfully well-behaved children entered. She extended a hand to me, that reminded me of taking up a fish, and when I said, 'This is my wife,' she turned round, and went through such a peculiar contortion of her backbone, to represent a courtesy, that my heart sank for Susan. But it did not need, for the bright little figure jumped up, and holding up her face, said, 'You see, I was very impatient to see you; you are my sister, you know, and I hope you will like me, because I intended to like you.' Who could have resisted such a winning appeal? Caroline did, as far as it was possible; but she was obliged to relax a little; and then my good fairy turned to the children, telling them they must call her aunt, and come the next day and see what we had brought them from abroad. Somehow she so managed matters that my sister, when bidding us good-bye, added, 'And, Peter, if you can spare an evening to your family

now, perhaps you and Mrs Trotman will join our circle on Friday, as it is my birthday, though I cannot expect it to be remembered now.'

'Indeed, he *has* remembered it,' exclaimed Susan, and the moment the street door has closed the artful little puss says, 'My dear, you must go and buy her a present at once.'

At Lavinia's we met with a very similar reception, but my Susan was determined not to take offence. Indeed it is by the force of her kindly heart that my sisters are now ashamed of being so selfish and jealous towards each other. They see it is useless to bring spiteful tales to one, who always endeavours to make the best of people and their actions, and though they will never cease to look upon her as one who has robbed them of their brother, I don't think that in their hearts they dislike the transgressor.

We decided upon leaving Fitzroy Square, and finally settled upon a cheerful villa at Notting Hill. Dear me! I could write a volume on house hunting. 'A book of disappointments and misfortunes!' most people exclaim. Nothing of the kind. Susan turned these huntings into pic-nics. At breakfast she would read of 'A desirable residence at Richmond.' Sounding

something like what we were looking for, we thought we could not do better than go and see it. This meant, besides going over the house, a stroll under the old trees in the park, and a quiet dinner. Or it might be 'A villa at Kingston,' and down to the 'Griffin' we would go, and after dining we would take a boat to Hampton Court; then there were the drives to Acton, Ealing, Norwood, and the Crystal Palace. Almost every time we contrived to make a day's pleasure. I felt really sorry when we put an end to our excursions by deciding upon taking 'The Hollies,' Notting Hill.

At first I thought I should like to be more in the country, but Susan said that it would be a pity to give up my connection with the committees of the several charities and hospitals. She thought it became the duty of an idle man to look after the institutions which busy people could only give money to. And really I begin to feel myself of some importance, for now that I find courage to express my opinions and mention my suggestions, people seem willing enough to adopt them, and to regard them as being as good as those of other people.

Sometimes I ask myself, 'Am I the same Peter Trotman, who, nervous, bash-

ful, and discontented, lived in gloomy Fitzroy Square?' Old Bridget often says, 'Why, master, you're younger than when you were a boy. I was always throwing it up to you, what a shame it was you weren't married; but I can forgive you now, for you waited until you could draw a prize.' Susan would not hear of Bridget leaving us. She said she could not do without her, and I am so glad she stayed, if only to remind me of old days, and keep my heart thankful for the blessings I now enjoy.

The Jenningses and Aunt Ann were the first visitors in our new house. Susan and I were very busy getting all things ready for them, and planning some pleasure for each day. It was the first time any of them, except Jennings, had ever been in London, so you may be sure there was plenty for them to see. When they all arrived, Aunt Ann, Mr and Mrs Jennings, Mary and Sophy, what a houseful we were! I am sure there was not a merrier party in all London, nay, in all England, than we formed. Giving enjoyment to people so ready and willing to be pleased is a real treat. Even an evening with my sisters in their most cutting mood was not at all what it used to be. It is true they regarded the Jenningses as their

natural enemies, the destroyers of their family circle; for, knowing nothing of my railway adventure, they supposed it was through them that I had met Susan; they spoke of them as 'those artful people who decoyed their poor brother down.' But the coldness of Lavinia and the sarcasms of Caroline fell quite harmless, the only comment on them being from Aunt Ann, that 'they were evidently very superior women;' to which Mrs Jennings assented, but thought 'they couldn't enjoy good health.'

A good many tears were shed when the day of parting came, as was natural. Still we all brightened up when I promised to take Susan down to Smarden in June, and further arranged a sea-side visit to Swanage in the autumn. Our holidays seemed never ending, one only led on to another. What could be more delightful than the early summer at Smarden, the pleasure beaming in every face in the village to see my Susan looking well, and to hear her say, as she put her arm into mine, that she had never been so happy in her life. And when autumn came, and we all met again at Weymouth, for Swanage, what a time we had there, too! Boating excursions, wandering on the shore, and picking up fossils among the rocks, until

we wondered how people could go to any other place. Aunt Ann and the children have now a collection of stones and shells, which would make a good-sized grotto. Ah, what a happy life I live now. Susan has taken away all my crabbedness, and I have nothing left to desire. If any old bachelor, lonely and desolate, as I used to be, should read my story, let him follow my example. Take heart! never despair! and in the porter's words, 'Good luck! good luck!'



## SAVED FROM THE WRECK.



### I.

**T**HERE'S not a trace left of the cottage which once stood by the Tower side of the beach, and which was the first and last house in the village of Ursley. It was a snug, cheery little place, all painted black outside, with long, low windows, whose small panes shone in the sun like diamonds; and if anybody who stepped inside hadn't called that room a reg'lar picter they must ha' been hard to please, for I don't know one single place on the face o' the world's globe that could be mentioned but old Mat Lawson would have pointed to some sort o' a curiosity, and said, 'Mate, that 'ere comes from there.' Oh, he was a clever old chap, Mat was. He'd been to

every place, and knew something about everything; and now that he'd had a stroke, and lost the use of his legs, he used to sit by the fire-side and ruminate upon it all. Though he was past work he didn't want for anything, for, one way or another, in his time he'd saved a decent little sum of money, and nobody in Ursley had things more comfortable like than old Mat. 'Tisn't too much to say that in my young days to me that cottage was heaven upon earth. I hadn't got much of a home myself, for my father's missus wasn't my mother, and the house was in a constant uproar with a parcel of youngsters who got cuffed or spoiled, according to the mood she was in, which (being a little given to drinking) was generally a pretty contrary one. Of course I was a sailor, and reckoned pretty handy; and old Mat, with whom I was an uncommon favourite, employed me to sail the little craft he was part-owner of, so that there was always an excuse for his being the last house to go to before I left Ursley, and the first to enter when I got back again. I suppose I needn't say that old Mat was not the entire cause of all this. He had a daughter who was the pride of the place; for, go where you might, you never met the equal of Norah Lawson. I'd known her ever since she was a little tod-

dling thing so high, when I was a great, awkward boy, and used to carry her down the beach, or swing her across the ford stream. Little by little she'd crept round my heart till I just worshipped her; and she knew it too, and used to make me fetch and carry for her like a dog, and run here and there at her bidding as if I'd been only born to be her slave, which, I take it, was pretty much the light she did at that time view me in. However, so long as she never asked any of the other chaps to do anything for her, I was happy; and in all her talk of what she should do, I noticed my name was always brought in, so that I felt nobody had the same chance with her that I had. Old Mat, I know, looked upon me as his son, and in the village everybody coupled our names together. It was just as it took Norah when she heard any of this joking,—one time she'd fire up and wonder what people meant by it, at another she'd burst out laughing and look at me with her lovely eyes till I didn't know whether I was standing on my head or my heels. Well, matters was just in this sort of trim about the end of one September. The month had been a very hot one, and now we were in for a regular storm. It had threatened, on and off, all the week, and every one saw that this night

there was to be no more shilly-shallying.

I'd been down to see everything made taut on the beach, and on my way back I dropped in to the cottage to tell the old man what I'd been doing. Of course that meant not stirring out again, and I took my seat opposite Mat, and Norah with her sewing sat up to the table between us. I don't think I ever saw the little place look nicer than it did that evening, for there was a good log of wood on the fire, which made a crackling blaze and lighted up the walls all lined with pictures and models of ships and boats set up between bows and arrows, clubs and darts, all arranged in fancy patterns. Outside we could hear the wind howling, and the sea roaring, and between the pattering of the rain upon the windows, every now and then a dash would come which we knew to be the spray from the heavy masses breaking on the boulder stones. Old Mat was telling us about the foundering of the 'Cassandra of Bristol,' which was one of our favourite stories, and which the oftener you heard it the more you wanted him to tell it over again. The tempest raging outside seemed to draw us all closer to one another; and though I was listening to what her father said, my eyes rested on Norah with a look of love I couldn't keep back, and she herself (when

*SAVED FROM THE WRECK.*

the old man made a pause, to turn the wood a little) said,

‘I’m glad you’re not out to-night, Ben, or we should be in a way about ye.’

Just then there came a shake at the door, and, lifting the latch, who should it be but Ginger Tom, from Crass Point.

‘Why, Tom, what’s up?’ says old Mat, for we saw by his face something was amiss, though he didn’t speak for a minute, but stood wringing the wet off him and wiping the dripping rain from his face and hair.

‘There’s a vessel off the Crass, tossing about as helpless as a new-born babe,’ he answered, and a dull boom came through the wind and roar which made me and Norah start to our feet. ‘She’s been driving right to shore for hours, I reckon,’ said Tom, ‘and now she’s just missed the landing, and is on the Crass Point.’

‘Then there isn’t an Ursley man aboard,’ said old Mat, with a shake of his head.

‘I can’t rightly make out what sort of a craft she is,’ Tom went on; ‘she ain’t partickler large, but there’s a goodish number o’ hands aboard.’

‘Emigrants,’ says old Mat. ‘The Lord help ’em then, for the sea always seems dead agen bearing ’em to where they wants to go to.’

You may be sure that Norah and I weren't standing idle while this talk went on. She fetched the lantern and began trimming it, while I opened the locker and took out the few rockets and blue lights that old Mat kept there in case of signals being needed. Before my tarpaulins were on there was another shake at the door, and in came Tom Stevens, Hurst the pilot, and his brother Kit. They'd all got scent of the same news, and had run down to see what was best to be done.

'She'll go to pieces,' said old Mat, 'before another hour's over. Why, she must be on the Tiller reef now. Your only chance, boys, is on the beach. A rope or wading in may save some poor soul the sea is tossing about.'

So we got what ropes we could, and off we ran, I turning back to nod to Norah, who stood in the doorway half-inclined to run down with us, and calling out to us to try and do all we could to save the poor dears. Folks who live in towns don't know how we sea-faring ones feel for them as seems helpless upon the water. The sea, somehow, seems to belong to us, and we love it, and know its ways; so they that don't have got a kind of claim upon us, and many's the time I have seen chaps that weren't so over-fond

of giving up to others risk their lives as free as air for people who never knew who they'd to thank for it, or, if they did, didn't always show 'em much gratitude. Not a man of us that night (and a terrible one it was too), with all Ursley out on the beach, thought a bit about himself or grudged any risk or labour to try and save a human life; but only one was given to us, and that fell to my lot. I could never rightly tell how it happened, and everybody said it was a miracle we weren't both gone; and once I did give all up for lost, but somehow we got to land, and it wasn't long before I'd come to and was able to get over to the crowd gathered round the poor fellow, who still lay like one dead. As is always the case, a fine uproar o' voices and clamouring what they'd best to do was going on there. Some said he was gone for certain, some cried to hold his head up, some to lay him flat down, while the most part was for holding him heels up and draining the water out, which used to be the first thing done to a drowned man.

However, old Mat had told me a thing or two he'd picked up from a navy doctor out somewhere, and I knew that he was sure to have hot blankets and bricks ready, so I says, 'Now, I'll tell ye what, mates,

whatever life there is in him I've helped to save, so give me first claim, and some of ye lend a hand to get him up to Mat Lawson's cottage.'

'That's the best thing,' two or three of the old uns cried out; 'then you can strip him and rub him with salt and sperrits.'

I never said a word against this, and they set to, and soon we were on our road, for the Ursley beach then wasn't one of the sort that seems made for pleasure-parties to land at and children to play upon,—it was a long ridge of stones, and you had to jump from one to the other across deep pools and eddying currents, until you came to a wall formed of the pebbles wedged together by the high water dashing against them. Then I ran on to tell what was coming, and met Norah standing outside with a shawl thrown over her head to keep her from the rain.

Well, soon all was bustle inside the cottage. Mat had a way of command with him so that without offending people he made 'em understand who he wanted to help and who wouldn't be of any use. We who stayed exactly obeyed him; and 'twas like magic the way that old fellow brought life back when to all ap-



pearance it had gone from this world for ever.

Norah wouldn't have her father put out of his reg'lar way, so the stranger was taken and laid in her own bed, and I remember with what a sort of reverent feeling I touched it and thought in my heart he was a lucky chap to be put there. After a time the rest of the neighbours left us,—only Norah and me sat up watching our charge. One place and another, gentle and simple, I've seen a fairish number of good-looking fellows in my day, but I don't remember ever meeting, for a right-down handsome face, such another as he'd got. His skin was as white as any maiden's, and his curly hair was like gold, and he'd got that sort o' look that made you feel tender towards him; and Norah, who was generally so stand-off, stroked his hand as she said, 'Isn't it white, Ben? I never saw such a skin in all my life;' and then she put her brown, strong-looking one by the side of it, and gave a little low laugh at the difference between them. All that night we sat and tended him, and for many days and nights after, for he was uncommonly bad and light-headed, and didn't know where he was, and talked and jabbered away all sorts of rubbish.

The storm strove for days, and the whole coast round was one sight of spars and damaged cargo; a few poor bodies was picked up, but not many near us, and when you did find 'em there was no telling from which of the vessels they'd come. Ah! things was quite different in the times I'm telling of. You know more now of what's going on in Barbadoes than you did then of what was doing at Bristol; they hadn't railways and telegraph wires, and it was a common thing for a bark to leave port and never her nor a soul belonging to her be heard of again. So everybody was very anxious for the young man at Mat Lawson's to get better, and be able to tell the tale of where he'd come from, the name of the vessel, and where she was bound. We often speckylated as to whether he'd lost those dear to him aboard, and Norah would say she dreaded his coming to himself because of the sorrow he might be called upon to bear. He lay so helpless like, that all of us felt that sort of pity for him we have for those left quite to our mercy; and to see old Mat and Norah tending and humouring him anybody would have said he was a dear son and brother rather than a stranger, whose very name then they hadn't knowledge of.

In the middle of this I was obliged to leave for one of my trips, and I was gone about three weeks. When I returned the first two I saw was Norah and the young man. They'd seen the 'Mary Jane' come in, and was standing together on the anchorage waiting for me. I must own I felt a twinge of jealousy at the sight, for they two made a couple you don't come across every day. Norah, with her nice print gown tucked up over her stuff petticoat, and her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks like June roses; her companion handsomer than ever now he was up, and rigged out in one of the reg'lar Ursley suits made for us sailor fellows. However, I hadn't much time for thinking, for before I could well step out of the old punt he'd got me by the hand, telling me how he owed his life to me, and what Norah had told him about me; and when I glanced at her there was that look o' pride in her face that seemed to lift off every doubt, and leave my heart like a feather. So, one each side of me, up to the cottage we went, he loading me with thanks, and when I said anything agin it Norah would break out with some fresh praise, and like egg him on to say more. Old Mat was sitting on the door-bench, and cried out as soon as he caught

sight of us, 'Here's the lad I'm proud to call my own. Welcome back, my boy;' and he gave me a grip of his fist that showed he felt what he said. By degrees I heard what my new friend had to tell about himself. His name was Smith; the ship he had sailed from Liverpool in was going to the Cape o' Good Hope with a party of Irish intending to settle there. She wasn't a reg'lar emigrant vessel, but seemed a trader who was taking the poor souls out cheap, not that Jim seemed to (indeed, he told us he didn't) know anything about his messmates, as fellow-passengers, for he'd been hanging about in search of a job, and that turning up, all of a sudden he made up his mind to take the voyage, and they'd only left Liverpool three days before the storm overtook them.

'He wanted to make me believe that he'd been a working-man all his life,' said old Mat with a shake of his head.

'I couldn't take *you* in, could I?' Smith answered laughing; and then he explained how an old gentleman had taken a fancy to him when a poor boy, and had given him the learning and ways of his betters; and then from dying without a will had left him dependent like on those who had always viewed him with envy and jealousy. 'So with the little bit

of money I was fortunate enough to bring to shore with me,' he said; 'and which is all I've got in the world to call my own, I determined to seek my fortune; and if it wasn't for the fate of the poor fellows who started with me, I shouldn't quarrel at being here, for I like the place and the people, and if they'll have me, I shall try my luck at settling down with them.'

Old Mat called out nonsense to that, for, as he said, with his book-learning, he'd get on anywhere. And so he might have, for a more clever chap I never set eyes on. He could turn his hand to anything, and it wasn't long before he and I were reg'lar chums. He took a lodging at a widow woman's near, but all his time was spent in fishing and going out short cruises with any of us fellows. He didn't take to any employment; and two or three times Mat said to him, 'Jim, what'll you do when that money of yours is gone?' because, though there wasn't many ways o' spending, he was very free with it. He'd only laugh and say he'd turn to something before that; and it seemed to him, I used to think, as it did to me, that £100 must last for ever. Without seeming to, Norah had quite changed to me since the night of the wreck: she was ever so much kinder, and kept most of her sharp speeches

for Jim, who would tease and laugh at her till she was in a regular passion; and then he'd go to work to bring her round agin, and he generally managed it. Of course folks used to laugh and call him my rival; and whenever the missis at home wanted to be partiklerly pleasant she'd say, 'Saving Jim Smith was the best day's work you ever did, as the stuck-up wench you've set your stupid mind on won't take a common sailor-man when she's a chance of a gentleman.' But I didn't believe it, for I didn't see it. Jim never seemed to hanker after going to the cottage; and when he was there he took more heed of Mat than ever he did of Norah.

I don't know what opened my eyes to the truth, but all of a sudden it came upon me that what Norah was to me, that Jim was to her. A thousand signs spoke now that never struck me before. She would follow his every movement, watch him going and coming. If he went out for a cruise with me, there was she on the beach looking for us to come back, though before we could put foot to shore she was off like a shot.

'There's your sweetheart watching for you,' Jim said one day in his laughing manner.

'Do you think it is for *me* she's

watching?' I could not help asking him; and I suppose my face told my feelings, for he said, quite serious like, 'Why, Ben, surely you're not jealous of me? It's no use any girl casting a thought after me, for I'm not one of the marrying sort; and if I was, I shouldn't be Norah's choice, I'm certain.'

And so it passed off; but I noticed he kept away from the cottage, and when, about a month after, I came back from a week's trip to Swansea, he told me that he hadn't seen Mat or Norah during my absence. Whether (because if she but held up her finger every chap in Ursley was ready to run after her) this off-handedness huffed her I don't know, or whether it was his handsome face and a way with him we rough ones hadn't got, I don't know, but certain it was to me that daily Norah's love grew and strengthened for Jim Smith. I couldn't find words to put down what I felt about it, and if it hadn't been that I saw she was miserable, I think my heart must have broke; but over and above every feeling for myself rose this, that, come what might, Norah must be made happy—time enough for me afterwards. Dear, dear! what nights and days I went through, scheming how to bring things straight, and thinking what I'd best do. It did seem hard that I should have saved his life for

this! One thing to me was plain, and that was, I couldn't stop to see Jim hold the place I'd strove so to gain. No; I must leave Ursley, where I was only a hindrance to them two; for I made no doubt but Jim would be only too glad to snap at a girl like Norah, whose praise was in everybody's mouth. The men never rested a' holding her up as a pattern maiden; and though the women (specially the gossippy ones) sometimes cut up rough, and called her proud, and stuck-up, and Madam Head-above-all, I believe in their hearts they liked her, and didn't mean what they said; for it was only her little manner, because she'd been from a child taken such notice of.

Old Mat said all of a sudden one day as we two were alone, 'I can't think what ails Norah,—she seems so moody of late. Have you noticed it, Ben?' I looked up, meaning to give some off-hand answer, but when I saw his face I felt there was more in his look than his words meant, and a something came over me that made me break down, and hide my face in my jacket-sleeve. 'Don't give way, my lad; she'll come round yet, I trust; but it cuts me to the heart to see it, Ben, that it does, my son.'

I knew what he meant, and I could hardly get out the words to tell him not to



mind me, but to make her happy, and not to be surprised if I went off suddenly some day, for 'it's my belief,' I said, 'that Jim's hanging back because he thinks I've a sort o' claim upon him. When I'm gone it'll all come right, guvnor, and he'll make her happier, perhaps, than I should ha' done. This is a hard sort o' world, Mat, and some day, when you two are by yourselves, tell her how I thought of her, and always shall, and ask her not to forget me, Mat. I should like ye, when you're all comfortable of an evening, sitting here, to name me now and then.' And then the two of us broke down for a minute, for we felt it was a sort of leave-taking between us; and so it was, for I'd made up my mind the next time I went to Swansea or Bristol to make a bolt of it, and not return again. I felt now and then tempted to say something to Jim, but a feeling on Norah's account kept me back; and besides, I sought his company alone as little as possible. Well, the morning of my going came without a soul suspecting that I did not intend returning. Old Mat was sitting on the door bench, with a few cronies, and I loitered and said two or three words to them as I looked inside at Norah moving about in a heavy, don't care kind o' way, quite different to her.

'Good-bye, Norah,' I called out.

'Oh, are ye going, Ben?' she said, coming and leaning against the post.

'Yes; good-bye.' She nodded her head, but seeing I was holding out my hand, put hers into it, her face never altering a bit. All of a sudden it flamed up scarlet, and somebody who I knew must be Jim laid a hand on me, saying, 'What, are you off, old fellow?' and with a few words more I ran down the beach to the anchorage, only turning back once to see the group, whose print I carried in my heart for five long years, and whose faces I longed to see with a yearning sickness which became at last unbearable.

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## II.

IN those five years, between the time I left Ursley and what I'm going to tell now, I'd been twice to England, but never home. After I got to Bristol and had discharged my cargo, I got an Ursley man to take the 'Mary Jane' back, and deliver a letter to old Mat, telling him how I had gone for good, and that when what had sent me

away was all over, would he drop a line to a direction which I gave him? I never got this letter until I had been to China and back again; and though I thought I'd quite given her up, and always tried to say to myself it was certain she was Jim's wife, still the knowledge that it really was so was terrible hard to bear, and I'd no heart to stay ashore, and very soon put the rolling sea again between me and they who lay uppermost in my thoughts. Trouble is a sore burden to one who's got nothing to do, when his work's done, but to brood upon it, and this it was that first made me take to book reading. At school I was never one for learning more than I could help, but now I seemed as if I must try and get something into my head to drive Norah out, and this accounts for the little bit o' knowledge I've picked up, and which has been an unbounded comfort to me ever since. Well, to go on—I'd been to the Gulf of Mexico, and had just returned to Portsmouth,—I can remember it all as if it was only yesterday. I know I'd just landed at the Hard, and was standing thinking what I should do with myself, when a little sailor chap among a boat's crew waiting for somebody says to me,

'I think I know you.'

'Do ye, my boy?' I said.

‘Yes,’ he answers. ‘Ain’t you Ben Pearce?’

‘Ben Pearce *is* my name.’

‘Yes,’ says he with a grin, ‘and I’m young Tom—Ginger Tom, you know.’

‘What little Tom Norris, from Ursley?’ Lord, I felt I could have hugged the boy. ‘Here, come along with me,’ I says, catching hold of him; ‘your chum’ll give ye a hail when the officer’s in sight,’ and I turned with him into the Blue Anchor, and ordered something for us, that I might ask the little fellow a question or two. He hadn’t left more than a few months, and the first thing he said was—

‘You know old Mat’s dead?’

‘Dead!’

‘Yes, and buried; oh, up twelve months agone and more. He had a stroke while Norah was away.’

‘Away where?’

‘Why, don’t ye know about her neither? Why, she ain’t married at all. When it come to that, her man had got another missis afore her. Folks say he was a reg’lar bad one; he cut away from Ursley, and Norah went off after ’im, and then she come back looking all wished and altered, and when she found the old man was dying she all but died too, but she never quitted a word about Jim, only she

said she was to be called Norah same as before, and not Mrs Smith no longer, and the ring was gone from her finger.'

'Where was she when you left?' I managed to say, for the room and everybody in it seemed swimming round, and I felt like anybody in a maze.

'At the old place. She's got a little boy; he's called Ben.'

I hardly know how I parted from young Tom, for all seemed in a maze. One minute he was telling me about it, then on a sudden like I was back to my ship asking for my discharge, which matter was no sooner settled than I was on my journey to Bristol, from which place (not wanting my return to be noised about until I had seen Norah), instead of going straight to Ursley, I went to Bad-dicombe, and from there I walked, reaching Ursley in the dusk o' the evening. By the time I had passed all the old places which, while I had been away, seemed to have grown twenty times more dear, and had got to the cottage, my heart was pretty well up in my mouth, and I had to call up all my strength before I could lift the latch.

There she sat in the little room doing her sewing, though the work was lying in her lap, and she was looking at the child

playing with some shells at her feet. At the click of the door she turned her head slowly round, and though I hadn't intended speaking there was that look on her dear face that seemed to stab me to the heart, and made me call out, 'Norah.' I shall never forget how she took seeing me. She jumped up a bit frightened, and then sat down, throwing her apron over her face to hide it like, then all of a sudden dashing it off, she snatched up the child on to her knee, and sat looking, with her bright colour rising to her cheeks, as proud as a queen. I never said another word to her, but I went up to the boy and says, 'You'll come to Uncle Ben, won't 'e?' and the little chap held out his arms. 'That's right,' I says, tossing him up. 'Why, you *are* a king, and no mistake! How proud grandfather would ha' been of ye, bless your heart!' and I kissed his rosy face to hide the tears that I couldn't keep back from my eyes, for I saw by this time Norah's head was laid on the table, and she was crying like rain. I didn't try to stop her, but at last I said, 'Norah, when you can, you'll tell me about the dear old man, for it was told to me quite sudden at Portsmouth that he was gone, and I haven't rested day nor night till I got here. I didn't want to see any-

body, you know, till I had heard it all from you, Norah, for he was like a father—ah, more than a father to me! I've walked from Baddicombe,' I went on; 'would ye mind giving me a cup o' tea? for I didn't make no stop on the way, and I begin to feel terrible faint and weary.' This I did to rouse her; for there's nothing, in my opinion, brings a woman round like seeming to want help from her.

She jumped up in her old way and bustled about the tea, and would put a salt pilchard on to boil, 'cos,' says she, 'don't 'e mind how father used to say "Ben's always a nose for a pilchard?"' So by this I knew she wasn't sorry to see me back; and while she was laying the tea-things I made friends with the little chap, who was a rare one to look at, and the very spit of his father. Well, we had our tea and all was cleared away, and we talked of old Mat, and where I had been, and all sorts o' things; but though time wore on, of *one* no word was said, so, thinks I, this'll never do. If I'm to befriend Norah there must be a sort o' confidence between us; so with a beating heart I spoke. 'Norah,' I says, 'if you'll only let me be as a brother to you, for the reason that I'd a son's love for your dear old father, that brother I'll be, true and constant, and one who'll watch over

the little chap as the apple o' his eye; but there's one question I must ask, 'What's become of poor Jim?' for somehow I'd taken it into my head that perhaps he was a transported convict somewhere—anyway to be snatched from home and Norah, Lord! I could pity him there, for none knew better than me how that shoe pinched.

At first and for a long time I didn't think I should get any answer. At last by degrees she began to speak, and then it seemed as if, having once broken in the door of her silence, she couldn't rest till she'd eased herself of the whole burden, which, poor soul! had been a heavy one to bear, and which she often said seemed to lose half its weight after she told it to somebody. I'd best tell it as she gave it to me, and as near as I can in her own words, she sitting in old Mat's wooden railed chair with the child asleep in her lap, while I, drawing up close to the table, leaned my two elbows upon it and rested my chin on my hands, so that I needn't confuse her by looking too fixed in her face.

'When we knew for certain that you were gone for good, Ben,' she began, 'Jim was in a fine way, and took on so, that I felt quite angered with him, for long before that, though he hadn't spoken in so many



words of his love for me, he had made me to understand that if no hindrance lay in his road I should be his choice; and latterly, when he stopped away, I knew it was because he wanted to try and forget me, not that he didn't want to come and see me. It was a long time before we were married; and if I hadn't been so overlooked about him, I should ha' seen that he was always setting up things to stave it off and put it o' one side; but I was blinded, and quite put out when father would show any sign that he blamed Jim for the delay. Without my knowledge, at last father spoke his mind to Jim, and after that the day and all was fixed. Though we went to Bethel, still of course I meant to be married in church all proper; but Jim was dead against it,—he couldn't see the good of going to Shirley Crass to be married, and he didn't hold with church-going, so I had to talk father over, and we were married one morning quite on the sly (though why nobody could tell), away at the registry office.

'Before long (though I carried my head so high) I ceased to be a happy woman. True, I was Jim's wife, but I knew no more about him than everybody else in Ursley did: only this—that I was sure what he told about himself wasn't

true, and that he'd got some secret which he didn't intend parting with. Then father and he didn't get on together, for Jim was one who kept all his fun and frolic for out-o'-doors, and after a time at home he was as different as could be, moping and fretful, and not very patient if all didn't go on quite smooth. Father wanted him to take your place in the *Mary Jane*; but though he was for ever on the water, he wouldn't take to anything but pleasure cruising. After a bit we moved to a cottage on the Crass road, I thinking perhaps things would go more smoothly if we were by our two selves; but no,—day by day I saw Jim growing more uneasy and discontented, and hankering after something he wouldn't tell to me. One evening he said he was getting rather short of money, and he should go and see if he couldn't get the folks who'd got the property he ought to have had to give him something. I didn't like it, and I said as much, for I'd rather have seen him independent and ready to work. However, before he spoke he'd made up his mind; so, with every caution not to say anything but that he was gone to Bristol, he left me. He was away about a week, and when he returned he was more cheerful and like his old self. He hadn't got any more money, and he

made up some story to me about the reason of it; but I'd come to put no hold by what he said; and though I didn't know why, I felt, when he talked about who he had seen and what he had done, it was false. And so it proved. After the child was born I was terrible cast down. They used to say I hadn't got up my strength, but 'twasn't that which made me so dull and heavy-hearted,—'twas seeing Jim's anxiety to be off again, and noticing how father was breaking up. You wouldn't ha' known this place, Ben; and oftentimes when I've come down and seen him looking so wished and lonely, my heart has seemed as if it must burst, and I've tried to talk about old times, and then he'd grow so cheery, and his old laugh would come back thinking of the days when we were all light and happy. But dark times was in store for me. Jim had been that restless and fidgety of late, there was no pleasing him. One morning he had gone out for a sail, and had got becalmed. Dinner-time was past, and I went out up the village to get some things, when passing Trethyn's, old Isaac tapped at the window.

“I've got a letter for your maister,” he said. “He told me to keep it until he called, but I 'spose it's all the same whether I give it to you or to hé, and he's main anxious

to get it, for he's been about it every day for the last three weeks."

' "It's all right," I said, taking the letter from him and turning my face homewards, determined to read it for myself and see what this secret was he could keep so fast from everybody. It took me a long time to get through the letter, and by the time I had come to the end I knew I was as dirt under-foot to Jim compared with she who had wrote all this. I didn't take on as you might think,—I never shed a tear; but something seemed to take hold of me and make me hard and fierce. I put on my bonnet and went straight back to Trethyn's, and I said to the old man, "That letter means no good to Jim,—'twill only unhinge and disturb him, so don't say that it ever came, and he won't be none the wiser."

' "Well," he answered, "I don't know as I can do that; but when he asks me if there's any letter for him at the Post, which is his way, I don't see that I'm called upon to say more than No, and for to-day and to-morrow I'd manage to give him the slip, and leave Nanny here; and I reckon if he don't want it known that he's had a letter he won't ask my missis about it."

' So Jim never knew this letter (which, from reading it every hour of the day, I

could have said out loud) had come, and he went on inventing lies as reasons why he should go off again; and I listened and seemed to trust him until for the second time he had gone with a promise to be back in a week; but two, three went past and no sign or word came of him; then feeling that I, his lawful wife, the mother of his child, was being deserted for some fine madam who had no claim upon him, my blood turned to fire, and one evening I went down to father's, and unburdening myself, I begged and implored for the money to follow him, for I felt certain he'd gone to where he'd been before, the place she wrote from.

'When I showed father the letter it seemed to knock him over altogether. He didn't try to dissuade me from seeking him, but helped me all he could. Charmouth was the place, and it turned out that father knew it well, and had a friend of his living there, the widow of an old chum, who kept the Ferry House, so to her I was to go; and leaving the child with Eliza Dodd, who had done for father since I left home, the next morning I started. I was two days getting to Charmouth; and what with excitement and grief and eating all but nothing on the road, when, all scared like, I got to the little public-house, I was more

dead than alive. Before she knew who I was Mrs O'Keefe was as kind as could be, but when I got out that I was Norah Lawson, Mat Lawson's daughter, I thought she would ha' eat me, nothing was good enough for me, and I soon felt I'd found a real friend. Of course I didn't want more to know of my trouble than could be helped, so I said I'd got a little business to do for my husband which had brought me there, and then after a bit I asked her, as if for talk's sake, did she know one Miss Julia Wilson of the Park House.

"La! yes," she said. "Do you know anything o' them?"

"I turned it off by saying I'd heard a friend o' mine speak of her.

"Oh, I dare say, for Wilson rose from nothing; my poor Joe could remember when he kept The Flag o' Truce at Merryton, and then he took The Triumph, and so he got on; but, bless ye! he forgets all that now, and wants to pass off for a gentleman. However, they had a reg'lar pull up a little time ago when Miss returned from boarding-school. All at once it was given out she was going to marry a London gent, who kept his yacht and I don't know what all, and who she'd met at a friend's house. Whether that was true I can't say, but in the midst of it down come

the police after him, and it turned out he was only a clerk, and to make this dash he'd drawn on or taken money from his master."

' Ben, can't you picture what I felt? and when she said he'd got off to Liverpool and embarked, they said, aboard a ship that went down in the Channel, don't you wonder that I didn't faint at her feet and die then and there? But I didn't,—I seemed turned to stone. Ah! yes, I can cry for pity of myself now, but all that time I never shed one tear; only in my ears like a tolling bell sounded, "A thief's wife, a thief's wife," until I thought everybody near me must hear it too.

' Mrs O'Keefe was kept in a constant bustle with her business, so it was easy enough for me to slip out without her asking questions, and I wanted to be by myself to make up my mind what to do, for I seemed in a tumult as to which plan it would be best to take. I walked along by the quay-side unnoticed among the numbers o' people hanging about, and belonging to the vessels lying there. All at once, passing a little knot of men, the voice of one of 'em struck into my heart. It was Jim. I stood still and listened, and heard a man replying something about starting the next evening. Could he be

going to abandon me without a word? but I dare not wait for more. Fearing I should be seen, I hid myself behind some goods' crates near, and watched for him to part with the others; then, following close for a bit, as soon as nobody was near us, I took hold of his arm and said, quite quiet like, "Jim." Before I'd time to get the word out he gave a start as if he was shot, and then said, with a little laugh, as if to see me was a relief, "Why, Norah, is it you?" I couldn't answer for a minute, and that minute gave him time to recover himself, and he began in a reg'lar bullysone voice to ask what I was doing there. I can't tell *you*, Ben, all I said to him, but I suppose at last even he saw the rights of it, for from swearing at me, he turned to cursing himself, and calling himself everything that was bad and wicked. "Jim," I said to him, "don't go to add more sinfulness by dragging down this other poor creature. Sorry as you may be for it, I'm your wife, and if I can do nought else I'm bound to try and help ye. I'm not your equal, nor hers, in learning, and if you'd only said one word that you cared for her, Jim, you know we shouldn't be as we are. I know the wrong you'd done before ever we met, and the burden will be as heavy upon me as it is



upon you, but if any one can help you to bear it, Jim, it shan't be for want of trying that I'm not that one, and if it can be paid back, I'll work my fingers to the bone to do it, so now make up your mind, —promise me. You must go to the girl, and tell her that you've acted wrongly by her, but that you mustn't ever see her again. Jim, try and be straightforward from this time, and begin by telling her that you've got a wife; she'll thank you for it some day, and some day you'll thank me too, Jim."

'You see all my fierceness had died out. I had said everything that was angry and bitter, and now I seemed as if I could screen him from everybody else. I thought if I could but get him home again I'd try new ways, and never rest until he was a different man.

'Well, we'd got by this time away from the houses to a sort o' common. All of a sudden Jim put his hands up to his face and groaned. I, fancying 'twas that he couldn't bear to go and expose his faults, said, "Come, Jim, say you'll tell her." "Tell her what?" and he stood still looking at me. "That I'm your wife." "I can't," he said, in a sharp voice. "I married her before I ever saw you;" and with them words, Ben, I fell down like

anybody dead at his feet. And what a mercy I should have looked upon death as then! Child, father, all was forgotten but my misery, to which I was soon alive again, and listening to what Jim had to say,—the truth, I felt, this time. He was the money-keeper to some large business concern in London, and I think 'twas at church saw Miss Wilson first. They were struck with one another, and by false letters and such-like they contrived meetings. Finding she would be very rich, Jim induced her to get married secretly. They were married while the schoolmistress thought the young lady was on a visit to an aunt, and it was to get the money to go about this wedding, and to appear to her to have a good deal, that he first helped himself, thinking he should be able to put it back before it was missed; then, when he went down to visit his sweetheart, he wanted to keep up the dash, and was tempted to take more, and before ever the second wedding could take place (for, finding the father pretty agreeable, they made up their minds to say nothing of the first) the officers of justice were after him, and he had only time to get to Liverpool, and aboard the "Warrior Queen" just starting for the Cape, and you know the rest. His good looks had

been his ruin, Ben, for he'd been brought up above his station, his father having a little building-yard at Ramsgate, which accounted for his handy ways about boats. Whether at first he intended stopping at Ursley for good, and then got tired of it, I don't know, and he didn't say, but 'twas evident by his seeking out the girl that he was hankering after a change.

“What am I to do?” he kept saying quite in a helpless way; “of course she thinks she is my wife, and lately an uncle has left her a little money, which she has offered to share with me; but when all this comes out about you I don't know how she'll act.”

‘He made excuses, he laid blame upon me, he said words hard and bitter to hear, and he tried to carney and coax me; but the thing that rankled deepest was the little love he had for me. That he feared me I saw; and, dreading what I might do, longed to be ridded of me, but he'd no more feeling for me than a stone. So we parted, I threatening him if he tried to escape without seeing me again, and making him promise that he would meet me the next evening.

‘Of course Mrs O'Keefe saw there was something up, but she wasn't one to ask questions about what you didn't tell her,

so she made me as comfortable as she could without talking.

‘I didn’t stir out all the first part of the following day, but in the afternoon she came and said, “There’s one of the quay boys wants to speak to you, my dear.” I went out, and he gave me a slip o’ paper, on which was written, “Come at once to last night’s meeting-place.” I felt sure something had happened, and I ran for my bonnet, and was soon there. At first no Jim could I see, but in a minute up he come from where he’d been waiting, looking quite altered, his hair all cropped short, a different suit o’ clothes on, and his face as white as that cloth.

“‘I’ve been seen,” he said in a kind of a whisper, but all thick and trembling. “If I can’t get off I shall be taken,” and his face and lips went like to the colour o’ lead, and he almost fell down before me, his knees seemed in such a tremble.

‘Ben, I forgot all my sufferings, and the wrong he had done me went straight out o’ my mind. All my thought was, how could I save him, and he saw it, and said, “Norah, you’ll help me *now*?” “Yes, with life I will; only tell me what to do.

‘So he explained that he knew of a ship starting for France that night, or very early next morning (the one he’d intended

going by if I hadn't turned up), only he dare not go on the quay to see the captain, then he durstn't return to the lodgings, for fear he should be tracked. What was he to do?

"Come with me," I said. I felt sure Mrs O'Keefe would take him in, and I told him so, and I'd go to the quay and make all straight for starting.

'When we got to Mrs O'Keefe's I told her I'd got a friend who was in a little trouble, and would she help us, and let him stay quiet in her house until he could give the slip to those who were looking for him?

'I saw in a minute that she took him for a poor fellow who'd run from his ship, and she agreed right off, for she'd many times done a kind thing that way before.

"You go along, and in five minutes bring him into the back door," she said, "take him up-stairs, and put him where you think best, then if they put me to Bible oath, I can say that I've never seen him, and don't know where he is."

'Jim seemed to breathe again when he found himself in the little sleeping-room Mrs O'Keefe had given to me; and after some talk I left him, and went to see the captain he had told me of. The vessel was loading for Cherbourg, and would

start at high tide, which would be at half-past two the next morning. "We keep it dark about our taking a passenger or so," said the man, "or else there's ill blood with the reg'lar boat, who looks upon them as her right. I'm sorry the hour should be so ill-convenient for you, ma'am. I suppose you're the lady going with the gent?"

'I seemed not to hear this, but saying we would be there in plenty of time, returned to Jim. After I had told him all the Cap'n had said I waited for a minute, and then said, "What are you going to do about *her*, Jim? she was to go with you, I find."

'His face got up like fire. "Oh, Norah," he began, stammering, "it's you who've saved me, and if you'll go—" I never answered, so he went on,—"I wish I had never come near this place; but it sha'n't be again. I wanted money then, you know, Norah; but I'll take your advice, and I'll get something to do. If you don't care about going with me, I could work my passage back to Ursley, you know."

'The lies, I saw, were coming back again, so I said, "You won't be even honest in your talk, Jim," and then I could ha' bit my tongue out for saying the

words ; but, Ben, I did feel terrible bitter sometimes. It seemed, from some further talk we had, that the other poor thing, though she knew his fault, was going to give him what she had, and forsake everybody for love of—well, her husband, for turn it how I would, I saw that I had no hold (except I counted revenge) upon Jim. The plan they'd hit on was this, she was to go to a friend's house to spend the evening and ask her father to let her stay the night,—this would prevent the old man from getting suspicious at her not returning—leave her friend's at 11 o'clock, meet Jim, and go off to the vessel. But now all his fear was whether the person who he fancied recollected him would go to Mr Wilson's house. He had seen a man, as he thought, dodging him, and the landlady had told him that while he was out a person had been asking his name and making all sorts of inquiries. This with his poor conscience was enough. He had given up everything for lost at once.

'It seemed as if that afternoon would never come to an end. Every bustle downstairs made our hearts beat with fear, and then Jim would turn to me ; but when all was quiet his thoughts would go back to how unfortunate things had turned out for him. And I?—I sat and pondered out what I

should do. I saw that anyhow to Jim I was nothing—then, feel as I might, with his real wife living, how could he ever be anything more to me? He kept on saying, “If he’d only a fresh start—a new beginning in life, he should do well.” Should I help him to this? Suppose I prevented her from going with him, what good was there in it? If I told her about myself—would making her wretched ease me? So I said all at once,

““Jim, I want you to answer me a question or two. Do you love your wife?””

““Why, Norah?” he said, confused, and not knowing what I was driving at.

““Oh, I don’t mean myself,” I said; “I ain’t any wife of yours. There, don’t say nothing more,” for he was beginning his excuses. “What I want to know is this—do you love her so as to be good to her and try and turn over a new leaf and become a different man?””

“He hid his face and I went on: “If so, I’ll meet her to-night, and she shall go with you.””

“He never spoke, but he burst out crying, and sobbed like a baby, and I sat and rocked myself to and fro, for, Ben, I seemed as if I was with my own hands tearing my heart out o’ my body. Well, at last it was settled, and by 11 o’clock I



was standing all lonesome in the road waiting, with a slip o' paper from Jim, for she who'd unknowingly killed the little happiness I had left to me. Of course she was in a dreadful fluster, and hardly knew what to think. "Oh! I wish he'd come himself for me," she kept saying; "my heart seems failing me." And well it might, for she was a mere girl to look at, with pretty fair curls and a timid trusting way, that made me think, Was I doing right in helping her to leave her home? a miserable one though so grand, with a worthless father who could never be called either drunk or sober; then Jim (or Mr Staunton as she called him, for his name wasn't Smith nor Jim either) was the husband she'd taken for better and worse. He'd told her I knew everything, and all the way along she kept thanking me and trying to excuse his fault, saying he was so good in every other way, and how fond he was of her, and how she'd nearly died of grief when she thought he was drowned, and I in my silent sorrow by her side asked why he'd been saved to break the hearts of them who'd never injured him. She must have thought me a poor creature with no word to say, for I couldn't talk to her, and was only too glad when we came to the place I was to leave

her at while I fetched Jim from the Ferry House. I believe what I was doing for him touched him someway, for his looks was cast down and his words all trembly and choky. I talked fast enough with *him*, for I didn't want no leave-taking. At last he said something about the child.

“The child!” I called out; “he’s mine—my own—no father ever dares to claim him, or I’ll tell every word I know. He’ll never see his father, and his father for his life durstn’t ever try to find out word of him.”

‘Then we was silent, and before he joined her I fell behind. By this it was getting on for one o’clock, and time they were aboard the vessel, which was already out in the stream. At the jetty the boat was waiting to punt ’em off; they turned round, and I stepped up. The tears were running down the face of the poor little soul as she put her two arms round me, saying,

“I can’t thank you enough for what you’ve done for us. I wish you were coming too.”

“I hope you’ll be very happy,” I managed to get out, though it seemed as if I was speaking with somebody else’s voice, and not my own.

‘Jim helped her into the boat, then he turned to me, and holding both my hands

tight in his, he said, looking in my face,

“Norah, shall we ever meet again?”

“Never!” the voice that answered for me said.

“God will reward you, Norah, for if ever one of His angels walked on earth, it’s you.”

‘He jumped down—he was gone—and with him seemed to go my life, and light, and hope. God was very merciful and watchful over me that night, for, Ben, many a time I had to turn from the water, where it seemed rest from my pain only could be got, and then He’d put the child and father into my head, and that gave me strength to resist the temptation.

‘There isn’t much more to tell. When I got back home, which I did as quick as ever I could, I found father had had another stroke, and though he wasn’t gone, he never spoke again. I think, for all he could give no sign, that he knew me, and just then it seemed to me such a mercy to be taken that I couldn’t grieve as I should ha’ done at another time. But as I got to myself, and my trouble grew old, oh! words couldn’t tell what his loss is to me, for spite of the child, oftentimes I feel so lonely. ’Tisn’t that folks ain’t kind when I chance to meet ’em; and at passing, father’s old chums have always a friendly

word and look for me; but how can one like I mix with her neighbours? If I am with the wives, their gossip is all about their husbands; if with the maidens, all their talk is sweethearts, and I've no part or parcel with any of them. I'm one by myself; and with others, more than when I'm *by myself*, I feel that I am lonely and alone.'

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### III.

So this was Norah's story, about which in the village I heard all kinds of speckylations. Everybody had got their own account to tell, though nobody knew the exact truth, and I couldn't bear to hear 'em pitying her, 'poor thing, for being so deceived.' They were sure somehow that she had found that Jim had got another wife, and that though she followed him, he would have nothing to say to her; and then many of 'em blamed her sorely for not having 'the nasty vagabond properly punished.' Well, I didn't leave Ursley again. I soon found something to do, and I turned all my head-work to hit upon a plan by which, without startling Norah, I

might draw her gradually on to consent in the end to becoming my wife. Her trouble only seemed to bring me nearer to her, and I pined to give her the right of holding her head up as an honest married woman. But wish, and strive, and scheme as I might, I was in Ursley going on for two years before I ventured to speak to her. Of course I had to stand many a laugh and bit o' jeering, for everybody saw plain enough what I was bearing up for. Norah was the only person in the dark, and she, I do believe, was so impressed that her disgrace had set her below any man's notice, that she never had a suspicion of what made me sometimes so silent and grave, and then, when a bit o' encouragement came from her, like a great boy for lightness o' heart. I do believe I should ha' gone shilly-shallying on till now, if it hadn't been for a circumstance which, though it doesn't sound very much to my credit, was a fortunate affair for me. Hurst the pilot had done a bit o' service to a craft which we both had got our own opinion about, and the Cap'n at parting gave him a bottle o' brandy and a couple o' bottles o' wine. I happened to be doing a little job to my sails, when Hurst come in, and I lent him a hand to hauling up the boat, and then we sat down,

for it was an uncommon hot afternoon, and Hurst began telling me about the craft, and showed me the bottles the Cap'n had given him.

'Here,' he says, 'I vote we try one of 'em, and see what it's like.'

So we got a mug out o' the boat's locker, and we set to, and anything more like good sweet cider I never come across.

'Tain't very strong,' I says.

'Strong!' says Hurst, 'I could drink a hogshead o' stuff like that; no wonder the French is a poor lot.'

'Twas a goodish-sized bottle, but we'd lost a quarter of it through the cork coming out all of a sudden, and the mug not being ready. Hurst had the best share, but between us we finished it.

I was never a drinking man in my life, and, would you believe it? that stuff got into my head, and after a bit I begins to think what a fool I'd been about Norah not to ask her to have me. Why, of course she'd say yes, why shouldn't she? for I'd got that opinion o' myself I felt I was as good as anybody, and I wasn't afraid of anybody, I was as bold as a lion, with a heart like a feather.

'Hurst,' I says, 'I'm a fool.'

'Are ye?' he answers, not a bit surprised.

‘Yes,’ I says, ‘for not speaking out to Norah.’

‘I’ve always said so,’ says Hurst.

‘Oh, you have, have you? Well, then, I’ll tell ye what, I’ll bet you as stiff a glass as ever you drank that before six o’clock strikes (it had just gone five) I’ll have asked her, and she’ll have said yes, too.’

‘Done!’ says Hurst, and off I went, and in another ten minutes I was standing in Norah’s presence; but if you ask me what I said to her, or how she answered, I’ve no more notion than a babe unborn, and she will never tell me. But this I do know, that though I didn’t remember when six o’clock struck to go back to Hurst, the next evening at the Bugle Horn we had the grog, and the healths that was drank and the names that was coupled was Norah’s and mine.

I got Norah’s consent to tell about the place a part of her sad story, so that folks might know for certain that she had every right to marry me. Then I never rested till the banns were put up at Shirley church, which was the church for Ursley parish, and a month after, we were married. I asked the neighbours to let us go up quiet by ourselves, as Norah wished it, and they did so. We was both pretty silent

on the road ; for joy, I take it, like sorrow, often lays an embargo on your speech. A shower overtook us as we went along, but it all cleared up before we reached the church, and the sun was out again, turning the heavy drops on the leaves and grass into shining diamonds. When we went through the little gate I couldn't help saying to Norah that 'twas like the way of our own selves, a few years of cloud to make us set more store by the sunshine now come. She didn't answer in words, for her eyes was brimming, but she tightened her hold on my arm, which I knew was all the same. When we got back to Ursley, which wasn't till afternoon, not a door could we pass, for everybody was on the watch to wish us happiness. Norah's spirits seemed to rise to see how friendly the folks felt towards us, and she was looking quite herself by the time we got to the cottage, which was to be henceforward our joint home. Dear, dear ! how happy and peaceful I felt sitting in old Mat's chair, with the little one on my knee, noting Norah's handy ways, and thinking there couldn't be such a lucky fellow as me in all the world. And life prospered with us from that time. I had constant work, and a tidy cheerful home to return to. For, though Norah didn't get back



her old light-heartedness, she always put away all moodiness the minute I hove in sight. And 'twas this putting away that at times angered me, for I fancied that when I was absent she often was down in spirits. I'd once or twice come home of a sudden and seen the tears brushed away. Now, what had she got to vex her? The boy was strong, healthy, and as good as gold. We had a little maid of our own that for beauty you couldn't a matched for twenty miles round. There was never a cross word heard among us; we'd good victuals to eat, clothes to wear, and as much money as we wanted in our pockets—why, the king and queen couldn't say more; still I'd got it into my head that Norah wasn't happy, and it did rankle inside me pretty considerable. It's my belief that most times the devil sows seed o' this kind, and then only notice how fitly he turns all that happens to suit its growing. Well, one morning I got a offer of a job that promised uncommon well, only it would cause me to be away from home for perhaps a week, or it might be a fortnight. This I didn't like, for during the four years we'd been married, I had managed never to leave Norah for more than a day or two. Still I couldn't help seeing I should be foolish to let this chance slip, so I made

up my mind, if she didn't object, I'd go. Well now, just like the contrary ways o' man, cos she fell into my views at once, I was put out. I'd rather she'd ha' begged me to stay, and, though I didn't say a word, I felt I could ha' given up the whole thing; and I went on brooding over it, till it seemed to me that Norah was anxious to be ridded o' me, and the very sight o' her nimble fingers getting ready the things for me to take wi' me stung me and made stronger the bad feelings within. All had been settled for us to leave on the Toosday morning, but at the last minute things was altered, and we wasn't to start now for a few days longer. On the Wednesday I had just reached home by a new cut that had been lately made behind our house from the village to the beach, when I noticed the figure of a man looking in to the windows, first one and then the other. 'Twas too dark to see his face, so I give a kind of a whistle, at which he scuttled off like a rabbit. 'Hulloa! what's up?' thinks I, so I bent down, screened from view by the little wall we'd lately put up, and began watching, which I was just tiring of when I see him stealing back again, looking round every minute to note if anybody was in sight. As soon as he found nobody was nigh

back he goes to the windows, seemingly trying to get a view of they who was inside. All of a sudden something in his attitude struck me as familiar. It couldn't be—it wasn't, and the sweat broke out on my forehead like beads, as I felt for certain that man was nobody but Jim Smith. My first thought was to run to Norah's help; but in another instant the devil was whispering to me, and asking if she mightn't know of his coming, and mightn't that have made her so anxious about my going off? So I stood my ground, and by-and-by he seemed to get more bold, and at last up he goes and lifts the latch of the house door. I followed on his heels like lightning, so quick that I heard the little cry (for Norah wasn't one of yer screeching sort) that she gave as she recognized him, and then she asked, in a sharp tone o' voice, what business he had to come anigh her.

'None,' he answered, 'none, except that I've nobody else to turn to.'

'Your wife?'

'Is dead,' he said; and, Lord! how my poor heart fell down at them words, for before I'd been rejoicing to think my suspicions was all false and unfounded.

'And did that bring you here?' she went on; 'because if so, you might ha' spared yourself the trouble. If I was

starving, and you could pave my way with gold, I should hold myself above you. I'm not the fool I was when your shadow crossed my path. Then, though I held the love of a man you ain't worthy to name, I was caught by your buttery tongue and flattering ways. God made me to learn sense by a bitter lesson, but He knows that, sore as my trouble was, I can thank Him now, for it's taught me the value of Ben's love, the blessing o' my life.'

Oh, Norah, how I thanked ye for them words spoken out with such a sound o' truth in 'em.

'Are you Ben's wife, then?' he asked in what seemed to me a reg'lar chopfallen tone.

'Yes, I am,' says Norah; and I was obliged to open the door-chink a bit wider to look at her, for I knew by the ring of her words that she was looking like a empress queen. But, to my surprise, the next thing Jim gives utterance to was—

'Thank God, Norah, for I've prayed for it to be so night and day. You say you're a different woman, Norah, to when we first met, and I am a different man. I have had a hard struggle to keep straight—a struggle such as good folks like you and Ben know nought about; and now, just as I seemed to be getting my head

above water, *she* was taken from me,' and there was a something in his voice that made the apple come up in my throat and stick there. 'She knew all before she died,' he said; 'I told her everything, and her last wishes was that, after I'd been and seen her father (for at the last she took it greatly to heart that she'd forsaken the old man), I would come to you and see you, Norah, from her. I've been to Mr Wilson, but he won't be softened against me, and he says if he spends his last shilling he will trounce me out and bring me to justice. I'm tired of hiding,' he went on in a broken-down way, 'and I've got nobody to care whether I'm took or not now, so I don't pay much heed to his threats.'

'Jim,' says Norah, holding out her hand, 'forgive the words I spoke. I didn't know what had brought you here, and I acted hasty. Now you say you're in trouble you know that anything I can do to help you I will, and I can answer for Ben,—his heart is in the same place it always was, so sit down till he comes, and I'll fasten the latch, so that nobody can take us un-awares.'

On this I makes up my mind to show myself; so as she comes to the door I begun shuffling my feet on the stone and calling out,

‘Come, mother, don’t be so spry at fastening me out.’

With that she steps hastily into the little porch I’d put up to keep off some o’ the wind, and holding the door to in her hand, she says,

‘Ben, who d’ye think’s inside? Why, Jim.’

‘Jim?’ I says.

‘Yes,’ she went on all of a hurry; ‘he’s in trouble again: his poor little wife’s dead, and on account of his having told her everything she made him promise to come and see us. He’s terrible cast down; and though old Wilson, her father, is vowing vengeance agin him, he doesn’t seem to have any care for hisself.’

‘Then we must take care of him, wife,’ I answers, putting my arm around her.

‘Oh, Ben!’ she says all of a sudden, ‘sometimes I wonder how God came to be so good as to give you to me. I count it o’ such value that latterly I’ve been quite moody-hearted when you was absent; and if I hadn’t said I would be masterful over myself I couldn’t ha’ let ’e gone this time. You don’t know what a battling I’ve had, Ben, ’deed you don’t.’

Of all the Jerry-sneaking brutes that I felt at that minute no words could tell.

Thinks I, 'I hope the Lord'll forgive me for not telling her about my ways, for so to lower myself in her eyes I can't.' So I passed it off with a hearty kiss, and without another word in we went. To say I didn't feel uncommon awkward would be a lie, for from the long time, and all that had happened since Jim and I had met, I seemed not to know where to look, nor what to do, nor how to speak, and I must say he seemed in exactly the same situation, only with that shame of himself which made me feel for him uncommon. At last Norah left us together, and then Jim up and spoke freely, and after that we both felt a little more at our ease. Norah made him up the very same bed on which I'd laid him all white and senseless the night we first came across him, and the whole o' that scene seemed to come back with a vividness which was most surprising. Certainly I never witnessed a greater alteration in anybody than in Jim: all his light talk and jokey sayings seemed gone from him, and he was like a man with no interest in his life. During our talk, when I rapped out about old Wilson (who, mind you, was about the last who could afford to throw a stone at any poor fellow, being as big an old thief as ever walked unhulked), Jim only said he didn't blame the old man for being

resentful agin him, but he couldn't pardon what he'd said of his daughter.

'Jim,' Norah says at last, 'if you was to pay the money off, don't you think, after all these years, your master might be satisfied?'

'I've thought o' that myself, Norah,' he says, 'and we had struggled and pinched the last three years until I'd got all but fifty pounds. I should have had that, but I couldn't see her want for comforts when her money was going for my evil doings.'

'I should go to the gentleman myself, Jim,' Norah went on, 'and give him what you've got, and tell him the whole story, then if he forgives you, as I believe he will, you needn't be afraid of any one. Now, don't shake your head. Suppose, then, that he don't, and it is as you say, that God has ordained that you shall be punished, well, then, the right person will have the money, and what's the good of your skulking? If you did so for a thousand years and you *are* to be took in the end, you will be.'

This seemed to strike Jim very forcible.

'You're right, Norah,' he said, 'and on your advice I'll act. I'll go to London straight off,—to-morrow, please God, shall see me start, and I'll have it one way or



the other decided ;' and after this he seemed ever so much brighter, and began asking about the Ursley folks, and how this one was getting on, and if so-and-so was still living, and so the evening passed off.

From the time Jim spoke about the money I'd had one thought in my mind,—why couldn't he have what old Mat left to Norah? 'twas tied up in the little canvas bag just as he left it, and we shouldn't ever want it; and as for children, 'twas my opinion then that they were better without money. That sum would just set poor Jim square, and I didn't see if all was honestly paid up how the gentleman could withhold his free pardon; so when we was alone I says to Norah—

' 'Tis a thousand pities Jim hasn't got all the money, isn't it?'

' Yes; I shouldn't mind a bit for him if so,' she answered.

' I was thinking o' that little sum of father's,' I says, hesitating, for I didn't know how Norah would view parting with old Mat's savings that way.

' Have you been thinking o' that, Ben? ' says she. ' Why, the very same struck me.'

' Then let him have it,' I says, ' and if he can ever pay it back, well and good ;

and if not, we shan't be none the worse.'

Therefore, as far as we two went that matter was settled, but a nice job we had to make Jim take it; however, at the last, when he saw we was determined, and should be hurt if he refused, he gave in, and with the money in his pocket he bade us good-bye, sorry to part, and yet glad to go, for it wasn't to be expected we could shake down quite easy together. Though he hardly spoke to the little chap, I saw him watching him, and I felt how it must cut him to hear his 'Daddy, do this,' and running to show me something, with 'Daddy, look here.' Ah! one way and t'other a man pays a heavy price for a sin o' that sort and no mistake.

Well, on the following Friday I started off on my trip, leaving Norah in a different spirit from what I should ha' done a week before. 'Tis a wonderful matter to feel sure you've got the heart of the one who is all the world to you; and happy as I'd been, I had never felt quite certain on that point; now, no matter what happened, nothing could daunt me with Norah's love. Somehow I'd managed to gain it, and come what might, 'twould be mine till death us did part.

By the time I come back Norah had

heard from Jim that all was right; the gentleman had received him more kindly than he could ever have expected, and instead of bringing him to justice, was much more likely to prove a friend, which latterly he did, and when he'd heard the whole story (for Jim said, and I believe him, that he kept nothing back) he offered him some sort of a post in the agency line in Australia, and we had a letter from him just as he had started, saying that he felt quite another man, and, please God, such he would prove himself; he said, too, that he owed all this to Norah, and that if it hadn't been for her he should be still a hardened sinner. Then he went on to speak about me, for Jim was a wonderful penman, and could write a letter that read like a book, and he ended by promising that we should always hear from him where he was and how he was getting on.

Well, time went on, and all run smooth with us till a sorrow was sent to us in the little chap being taken. Oh, that was a blow and no mistake! There'd been a good deal of a sort o' low fever in Ursley that summer, and all at once the boy began to ail. Norah was a regular hand at nursing in sickness, and she and me watched him day and night. But

it wasn't to be : he got weaker and weaker, and at last he died. Well, I couldn't ha' believed anything could ha' knocked me over like that did. We'd got two boys of our own beside the little maid, but so far from feeling any difference, I seemed I could ha' spared any of 'em better than he. He wasn't like a child, he was that sensible and knowing, and his little ways was beautiful to see. Norah and me often sit and talk about him now, for I've never seen his fellow since nowhere. Ah, 'twas a long time before the sun seemed to shine in its old way at home ; and for years the first treat the children had, after the long winter was past, was the afternoon when all set off with their baskets of primroses to do up little Ben's grave. I wrote word of it to Jim, and we had a letter back saying how terrible cut up he was. Somehow he'd looked forward to the boy growing up, and had clung to the hope that a day might come when they should know and care for one another. That was all over now ; but, spite o' the soreness o' heart that was visible all through, there was a bending under, and a spirit of resignation most beautiful to read of, and Norah and me both said there wasn't much wanting in Jim now. Well, 'twas about this time that Ursley began to alter completely.

It happened first by some speckylating folks building a few grand stone houses for lodgings, then the people who come was so pleased, that the next year there wasn't half enough room for all, so they set up a reg'lar hotel (the one that's the Clarendon now), and so it went on. This year 'twas a terrace, next year reading-rooms, 'til you didn't know where you was. Poor old Ikey Trethyn's house was pulled down for a church, and they had a post-office next to Tucker the grocer's, with a reg'lar man to carry out the letters instead of putting 'em all up in the winder, as they did in my day. In the summer provisions got so dear, that there was no keeping a family, specially we who hadn't got no garden ground; and Ursley, you know, isn't a boating-place,—the coast is too dangerous, so that we made nothing by the visitors; and what with one thing and t'other, we was forced to pinch and screw as we'd never done before. At last a talk got abroad they intended building a pier, and then Norah and me was reg'lar down in the mouth. Of course we knew that meant turning us out o' house and home, as we'd seen done to many a neighbour already forced to leave the spot where they and their fathers before 'em had been born, and had lived

all their lives. Very soon a gentleman come to know under what right we held the place. As I said, we didn't know nothing about right,—'twas up 70 years afore then that old Mat had begun by building a little place, which he added to it one way and another till he come to live there, and there he had lived and died, and Norah and me had certainly hoped to do the same. Nobody had ever asked the why or the wherefore before, and we'd thought that the place was as free to one as to the other.

'Oh dear no, my good man,' says the gent, in his high and mighty way; 'this place is the property of the Duke of Pembroke, who has sold it to a company, by whom I am commissioned to find out by what right 'tis that you hold your dwelling;' and when I spoke of its being hard, he pretended to be quite astonished.

'Hard!' says he, 'to leave a place like *this* when the company has built those model houses on the hill, and generously offered rooms there in exchange for any home it may deprive people of. Dear me! I am sorry to hear you speak like this.' But I wondered how he'd a liked to have been turned out of his house and sent to a place that looked for all the world like the new Union buildings. However, much as

I felt leaving, I couldn't show it, for Norah took it so to heart. You see she'd been born there, and her mother and father had died there, all the children had been reared in the old place which was as dear to us as if it had been a palace; and what with living being so outrageous, and now we should have house-rent to pay, times seemed completely altered, and we were as moped and broody as could be. But only to see how things turn out, and how we vex ourselves, bemoaning over sorrows that even when they're at our door oftentimes never enter in, for so it was with us. One morning the little maid, who'd grown into a handy girl; comes running in with a letter which we thought was from Jim. I was always the letter reader, so I begins examining the direction, and the seal, and so on, and I says,

'Why, how is this? this ain't Jim's writing.'

'Nonsense,' says Norah, and then she looks. 'Why, no more it is,' she says; 'whoever can it be from?'

Well, we couldn't make out, so we had to break the seal, and after puzzling over it for a few minutes, I says to Norah,

'Norah, he's gone,—poor Jim's dead,' and we both sat silent for a few minutes, and then we couldn't help talking together

o' what a nice fellow he was,—good to heart, in spite o' his faults,—of his handsome face, and how sorry he'd ha' been to hear of us leaving the old place, 'til she asked a question which forced me to go on with the letter, and in it it said, that in his will Jim had left the money we had lent to him with the interest to be paid to us, and, in addition, the half of his savings, the other half being left to enlarge a house a charitable gentleman out there had set afoot, where poor fellows who was industriously seeking employment could be lodged and boarded free 'til they could get work.

So there was the end of all our troubles. Old Mat's fifty pounds had swelled by magic, it seems to me, into one thousand, but in the letter Jim sent to us when on his death-bed (he died of a fever caught in attending some emigrants, poor fellow!) he said we was to view that as strictly our own, for he had traded honestly and luckily with the money, which always seemed to gather as it rolled.

That letter was enough to bring tears from a heart o' stone; and I've got it still safely under lock and key, that when Norah and me shall be taken the children's children may know what sort o' esteem she was held in, and be proud of her accord-

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ing. Of course poor Jim knew we wasn't people accustomed to money matters, so he'd left everything so that we'd no trouble, nor never have had. Every quarter a paper comes down and I sign it, and then, after that's gone back, down comes the same sum as regular as clock-work. The thousand pounds he viewed as ours, and that was left for us to do what we liked with, so I says,—

'I tell ye what 'tis, Norah,—we won't have no more turning out. We'll buy a bit o' ground—freehold, and build a little place to suit ourselves on it.'

This hit her fancy exactly, and the very next afternoon she and me set off for Shirley parsonage, and we sent in our dooty to Mr Carlyon, the rector, and said if convenient we should like to speak a few words to him. So out he came, and then I up and spoke and told him that I hoped he'd pardon the liberty we'd took, but from his marrying us and christening the children, and burying little Ben, we felt a confidence in him, being one o' the gentry, and knowing about money matters, which we didn't, and then I told about the thousand pounds. Well, he was so friendly in his manner (for though stern-looking he is an uncommon nice gentleman), that one thing led to the other, till he heard the whole

story, and at the end he gets up and he seizes hold of Norah's hand and mine, and he says,

'Ben and Norah,' he says, 'my friends, I thank you for telling me your story, and I'm proud that you think I can be of service to you.'

Norah dropped a curtsey, and we both thanked him for the condescension, which we might well do, for he made us have cake and wine and I don't know what all, and afterwards he managed all the purchasing and saw that we was dealt with fairly, and had the bit o' land properly secured to us for our own. The spot we chose is at the bend o' the Shirley road, so that we've a full view of Ursley Bay and Crass Point. It's a snug little house; and in the summer, when the visitors is here, not one passes without stopping to admire it and the little garden where I potter about most o' my time now, for the rheumatism has settled upon me terrible strong, and in both hands and legs I'm often crippled for months together; and then feeling that I've no call to be anxious about work, that I can sit beside Norah and take my ease in our own little home where we want for nothing, I bless the Lord for all His mercies, and repeat that His dealings with us are wonderful, and past man's understanding.

## CHRISTINE.

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**W**E had been spending the winter at Geneva, and now took advantage of the first spring days to make some excursions in the neighbourhood. The weather continuing fine and unusually warm, one evening, as the day began to draw to its close, we found ourselves nearing Chamounix, with the intention of remaining two or three days; instead of which, at the end of three weeks, we said adieu to its lovely scenery, and prepared to cross the Tête Noire. All the rest of the party could walk, but I must ride; so two hours after we started I found myself alone with my guide, who I saw was the only companion I was likely to have for that day. Well! I might be worse off, thought I, for I had found the value of Benoit Xavier's care and attention during

our stay at Chamounix. Always thoughtful, good-tempered, ready to run and bring any flower you admired, among the first to see and point out every beauty with appreciation, Benoit and I were very good friends. I looked at him as he walked along leading my mule, and said to myself, that truly he was a handsome man,—tall, and powerfully made, with rather a gloomy expression on his olive face, which vanished if he addressed you, when the dark eyes were all animation and the mouth all sweetness. He was about fifty, and had spent his life among these his native mountains. I had crossed the Tête Noire several times, and though its lovely scenery had not the charm of novelty, every other beauty seemed heightened, and memory recalled much that was bright to dwell upon. So Benoit and I proceeded in silence until we neared the little chapel. Here, to my great delight, we came suddenly upon a bridal party: the procession consisted of eight persons; the bride and bridegroom walked in front, she dressed in a short stiff petticoat, a kerchief crossed over her bosom, and a crown of white flowers, which I fancy had already adorned the head of many a happy maiden. Very girlish and pretty she looked, and I saw her give two or three shy loving glances at the rather

awkward-looking bridegroom, somewhat oppressed by his holiday garments. Behind them walked two friends—these, I fancy, the bride's father and mother—and bringing up the rear two little sisters, perhaps, looking very solemn, their childish faces puckered up into unwonted gravity. Soon Monsieur le Curé approaches with his hands stretched out towards them. The women kneel, the men uncover; a moment's pause, then the sweet, meek-faced old priest turns into the chapel; the wedding party follow. I am startled by somebody stationed near firing off two pistols, and before the echoes have died away Benoit and I are on our way again; and then, stirred up (woman-like) by the sight of a wedding, I am full of inquiries about lovers, and wives, and the general romance of this quiet district, and at last I say, 'Tell me some story, Benoit, about the people whom you know here. Don't shrug your shoulders; I am sure you have heard and seen many things to tell.' Benoit laughs, and protests he cannot presume to think he could tell anything which would interest Madame. 'Well, Madame must pardon him if he fails, which he feels he shall, but if Madame commands he must obey.'

'In Chamounix, long before so many

hotels were built, or that Monsieur Albert Smith had been there, or so many travellers came and went, close to where the Hotel Imperial now stands, there stood a cottage, in which lived the widow Simond, and Christine her daughter. The widow Simond was a clever, shrewd woman, who had such skill in making syrups and drying the herbs for fever drinks and tisanes, that she managed to support both her daughter and herself comfortably, and also to have the prettiest and neatest cottage in the whole village. All the young guides found their way to Madame Simond's, they said, because nobody sold such good syrup; but I doubt if it would have tasted half so sweet unless pretty Christine had handed it to them. You could not understand the meaning of coquette until you saw Christine. When you were away from her you might see girls of whom you said, "they have more beauty," or "their faces are fairer, their eyes brighter, their figures more perfect," but once on the bench before Madame Simond's *châlet*, and (framed in the trellis-work as she leant in the doorway) Christine stood before you, every other girl you had ever seen in your lifetime died straight out of your memory, and Christine, and Christine alone, took full

possession of you. How well I remember her, as one May evening I approached the circle her magic drew around her. At that time I was conducteur to the diligence that twice a week came from Geneva, and my situation was thought a very good thing. The travellers often inquired about the best hotel, and what accommodation they could obtain. This day one of the passengers was a handsome young Englishman. He sat next to me, and he kept up an uninterrupted conversation. When we reached Salenche he engaged me to walk to Chamonix with him, and on our road he told me that he intended remaining about the place for several weeks, as his object in coming was to make sketches for a picture of alpine scenery. He did not want to go to an hotel,—they were too expensive for poor artists; but if I could recommend to him some nice clean cottage where he could have lodgings, he should be glad to stay there. I thought over the few places of accommodation I knew, but some drawback generally presented itself with each; at length a brilliant idea possessed me—I would take him to Madame Simond's. She would know where he had best go; she always knew everything, so we made straight for the chalet. Round

the door were the usual group standing, lying, lounging, and there too stood Christine. I can recollect even the dress she wore,—it was short and was of blue woollen stuff, over it a white embroidered apron with a bib pinned in front, round her throat a broad black ribbon and carved ivory cross, her fair hair—she was the only fair-haired girl in the village—plaited to form a crown like a Madonna's, her eyes cast down, so that the dark lashes lay on her cheek, as she tenderly seemed to smooth the leaves of a bunch of alpine roses, which the young Michel had just presented to her. I had secured a bouquet of forget-me-nots on the road, and no sooner did I appear and hold these towards her, than my heart danced to see Michel's flowers thrown aside, and my own admired and caressed in their stead. I did not stay to think, or a whisper within me might have said, "Let somebody else come in half an hour's time with another offering, and your forget-me-nots will share the same fate as poor Michel's roses." But why should I think, and destroy my happiness? for, Madame, all I knew of happiness lay there;—the girl could make my life as Eden, or as a charnel-house. I loved her to the exclusion of every other feeling; she so possessed me, that she seem-



ed to have absorbed every bit of love in me. I was reckoned a good son and affectionate to Jeanne and Suzon, my sisters ; but since Christine had smiled upon my suit she seemed to have entered my heart, filled it, and closed its doors against every one else. Oh, the jealous torture she had put me to ! for when she was alone with me she seemed but to live to share my love ; and though I could obtain no promise, get no words from her, what words could be so eloquent as those eyes, soft and shy as a chamois' ? but even in the midst of this let but somebody approach, and she was so glad to see them, giving them and me at once to feel she was tired to death before they came ; now all would be bright and sunny. Nobody would have envied me much, for two passions were contending for mastery,—“ Love strong as death, and jealousy cruel as the grave.”

‘Christine never remained in the same mood long. Her favourite of to-day might find himself deposed to-morrow. To-night Antoine’s flowers were worn in her bosom, —he must draw the water to fill the stone pitcher, and have the last good night and a whisper ; the next evening, when he came with favoured boldness, Henri had supplanted him,—she had already a bouquet ; but her mother loved flowers—she would

give them to her. "No, no! Henri must fill the pitcher; Antoine would soon wear out the rope, he turns the handle too fast."

'Perhaps because I loved her best I seemed so seldom to get into favour. She would tease me more than anyone else, before me she played off every coquettish art; and when sometimes my temper and jealousy got the better of me and I abruptly got up and left, as the road circled round, and I passed her garden-gate, I found the pretty creature had run through and was standing to say softly, "Won't you bid me good night, Benoit?" and at the end of ten minutes' whispering there, when I let her go back, I was more madly infatuated than before. For a month before the evening I came with the Englishman from Geneva, Christine had changed to me. Ah, me! what a month of sweetness it had been! Every evening my flowers had been worn, and after I had whispered that before I presented them I covered each blossom with kisses, she would take them from her bodice and, with a sidelong glance at me, hide her pretty face in them, saying they were "so sweet." Then something was always wrong at the well, and would I come and look at it? And though she would chide me for detaining her, she did not hurry any more the next evening. Now, when I passed the

garden-gate, I knew I should find her there, and instead of laughing merrily and calling my protestations of love "foolish nonsense," she would look down and softly ask if "I really loved her so very, very much?" What wonder, then, that fresh confidence came every day? I only lived in her presence,—every moment which kept me away from her was a dreary age.

'When I left Geneva for Chamounix the travellers by the diligence often said, "What a merry light heart our conducteur has!" When I left Chamounix for Geneva it was "What a gloomy, surly fellow he is!"

'But to return to the evening when I and the Englishman approached to make our inquiries of Madame Simond. Christine was all smiles and blushes, and oh, with what pride of heart I turned to present him, and explain his motive in coming, feeling he must see the sort of ownership I had in that bewitching face! He at once explained, in the good French which he rather hesitatingly spoke, that he wanted to remain where he could paint when he liked, have none of the rules of hotel life, that his name was Monsieur Laurence, and he was English. Christine bade him enter, and very soon Madame Simond and he were arranging terms for money, because he was to have her rooms;—she often let

them in the busy time, she said, and she would be very glad to take him if her poor accommodation suited, and he would put up with the attendance of herself and her daughter. I did not exactly like this, but Christine appeared so indifferent to everything but going to the well with me, that my jealous fears were soon asleep, drugged by her soft words and loving eyes.

‘A week passed, and I had been again to Geneva and back, and as usual only waited to make myself look my best, impatient to see my enchantress. In vain did my sisters try to interest me in the things which had happened in my absence; if they did not relate to Christine, what mattered it to me? My dear patient old mother wanted her boy’s sympathy,—she had had the same bad pains in her limbs which set in with last May, and never left her until July. I stood first on one leg, then on the other, fidgeting with the handle of the door, until she bade me come and kiss her, and asked me if Christine Simond had given me the answer I wanted yet, and seeing my hesitation, dismissed me with a blessing, and what was then dearer still, praise of Christine. “She is a good girl, Benoit, and when you were away last winter, and Jeanne

and I were so ill, nobody was half so kind and patient. She has but one fault, but that may ruin her peace and yours,—Christine loves praise better than anything in the world.” I closed the door to shut out the last sentence,—nobody must blame her but myself, and my blame was always a torrent of passionate reproach, which jealousy alone prompted me to utter; now—she had not a fault in my eyes.

‘When I reached the *châlet* I did not find Christine in her usual place. Madame Simond came out to serve, and told me that Christine was busy attending to the English gentleman, who was having his supper. I sat quietly enough at first, then as the minutes passed I began to be somewhat impatient. Why did she not come? I was almost certain she must have heard my voice. Before the hour was up I was in a fever of jealousy, but at last, tray in hand, she appeared, and then seemed hardly glad to see me, but still comforted me by complaining that her mother should have taken a lodger. Monsieur did not speak French except so slowly, and then he did not understand her, and she had to say everything over, and over, and over again, and as she stood pouting under her wrongs my jealous fears began to vanish. Ten minutes after they had entirely gone, for

Monsieur Laurence coming down to smoke his cigarette, was taken no notice of by Christine, who merely dropped him one of her prettiest curtseys, and then turning to me, showed me all her joy at seeing me again. I did not leave Christine with a light heart this time I went to Geneva; a heaviness hung over me beyond the usual one of parting, and when I said adieu to her I implored her to think of me and my great love for her; and not being repulsed by any laughter or coldness, I ventured to put before her the happiness I would try and heap upon her, would she but consent to be my wife. I had plenty for us both, and when I had her to work for, why, I felt I should make a fortune by my exertions. Ah! I see her now standing in the little garden looking so fair, so calm, while I stretch over the gate, and by the moon's pale light greedily drink in every word that sounds like love, search for the smallest glance to tell me my prayer is not in vain, and after twenty "good-byes," and between each as many pleadings and promises, all of which I have said a hundred times before, Christine lets me draw her towards me, and looking at last in my face, says—

“Benoit, I know I really love you, and when you are with me, oh, so much!

But why have you to leave me? I cannot bear you to go this time; when I say adieu something seems to chill me."

'Now I could laugh for very joy of heart that her love was mine. Ah, I knew such happiness when I soothed her fears and felt those fears were for me! So we parted. In my contentment that night, what was parting for a few days, when I could look forward to such another meeting? But the morning brought less sunshine; and, as I thought over what Christine had said, a presentiment of evil seemed to take possession of me too; and this presentiment became stronger when I found some arrangements had been made at Geneva, which would prevent my returning to Chamounix for a week. And a very long week it seemed until the following Monday, when I drove up to the Hotel Royal, and felt myself free once more. Of course I had heard nothing of Christine since our parting, —I *could* only hear through some of our men, and somehow I never found courage enough to ask a word of *her*. I always hung about the Grand Quai at the time the diligences came in, for they had come from where she was, and so drew me towards them. It was something even to see people who, twelve hours before, had

breathed the same air she breathed. You may be sure it was not very long before I was on the road to Madame Simond's; and I was not very pleased to be joined by the young Michel, who, after a few inquiries, suddenly asked if I was going to see Christine, "Because if you are, you can save yourself the trouble,—she can see no one now but the English Monsieur Laurence; her whole time is taken up waiting upon him. He is to paint her portrait, to keep, I suppose, until he takes from us the original;" and Michel laughed and twisted his small moustache in his nervousness to see how I should take his news. "Very indifferently," I intend he shall say and think; but a great knot twisted itself in my throat, a heavy cloud fell before my eyes, and my heart sank down, down. Before Michel I dared not think of it, so I changed the subject to some Geneva gossip, and talked of twenty things without giving him time to answer; then, as we neared the cross-road, I bid him adieu, and hurried down, determined to wait until he was out of sight, and then return and enter the back way. If she was not in the garden, the doorway, or the salon, I would go into Monsieur's room, and if I found her there with him giving him the witchery I regarded now



as solely mine, why—a hot flush of passion seemed to choke me, and give life to such a demon of jealousy as had never before possessed me. I was soon over the low fence, through the little garden, and looking outside. There stood Madame Simond chatting with her customers, but no Christine, neither was she in the salon; then it was true, and doubtless she was with him. I never waited to think; another minute found me in the room they had turned into a painting-room for their lodger, and there, on a low seat, sat the Englishman, his upturned face and fair curly hair nearly touching Christine, who leaned over to look at a book he held. They were both laughing at something she was repeating after him, and I had time to take in the picture which seemed to convey such happiness and confidence in one another; and I—I was a looker-on, not in her heart, not in her thoughts, and driven out by this foreign stranger! In a moment Christine started up, and with flushed face exclaimed in what seemed to me such a harsh voice, “Benoit, I did not even know you had come back.” Monsieur Laurence was not at all discomposed, and without moving said, “Ah, Benoit, my good fellow, you are just in time to hear how charmingly Mademoi-

selle speaks English. While I am here I am going to give her some lessons ; in return she must teach me to speak her language as she alone can speak it." Was I dumb ? had I lost all power to speak ? for, try as I would, not a word of the torrent of reproach that rushed madly to my lips could I utter ! No sound came but a dull click in my throat, and not able to stand looking at them, I slammed the clumsy door with a violence that made everything in the house rattle, and ran down the stairs, through the back garden, out into the high-road, along it until I reached a lonely place, and then found relief in the flood of tears which came as soon as I flung myself on the grass. This, then, was what I had returned for ; this was the girl who had had every thought of my heart ! While I had been absent from her I had been quite surly to any comrade I met, because with others my thoughts could not dwell upon her ; when I was alone I pictured scenes in which my eloquence must have touched a heart of stone, and then imagination showed her to me in her sweetest, softest mood, until my dreams seemed so true that nothing but her presence was needed for their entire realization. I had returned home feeling such security in the certainty that she loved me,

and now all was scattered, every hope was dead. Oh, how I hated the man who had stolen my prize from me ! I never considered that he knew nothing of my devotion to Christine ; in his laughing salutation I saw nothing that did not savour of triumph and insolent security. I cannot remember perfectly the next few weeks, I only know that after I had seen Christine once alone, and had heaped violent reproach upon her, she would take no more notice of me ; if I met her she turned her head away. Once or twice, when I could keep no longer away from Madame Simond's, my presence was a signal for Christine to go in, and a few minutes after I heard her laughing merrily from up-stairs, or looking over Monsieur Laurence's shoulder pointing out to him the different Aiguilles, and discussing the best road for him to take to get a good view of the Chapeau or the Flégère for his picture.

'Monsieur Laurence was quite a favourite with all the frequenters at Madame Simond's. He had plenty of money, seemingly, and knew how to spend it ; he had always a pleasant word, and his merry face seemed born to smile and look happy. His picture of Christine was quite a success, and all the fortunate beholders declared it grew more like her

every day, and yet Monsieur was never satisfied. Indeed, he had said if he painted her over and over for a hundred times, he could never make her beautiful enough. It was evident she had stolen the young man's heart. Stolen his heart! What had she done to mine? turned it to fire, filled me with bitterness, killed me with despair. Once or twice in the chapel I had met a glance of tenderness, and a spring of love leaped up, to be drowned the next minute by the waters of jealousy. *I* would have none of her pity. I had seen how *he* laughed the last time we met; they should see I did not care,—I would not even turn my eyes in that direction; and then, when I found I could not keep them off her, I decided it was best—yes, I would look at her, but such a proud defiant gaze. Oh, she should not think my heart was breaking for her, my every sense hungering and thirsting for a sign of love. One afternoon, coming from vespers, she put her hand on my arm as we were leaving the chapel, but I turned myself away as if she had stung me; she hurried on, and I, after a moment, hated myself, and hung about the house all the evening, but she never looked at me again. She laughed and talked with Monsieur Laurence, and while she saw me looking she gave him the flowers she had

been wearing. I felt it was he, and he alone, that kept her from me; if he would go she would love me again, but he would never leave Chamounix without taking her; and, at the very thought of life without Christine, a darkness too heavy to bear seemed to fall upon me. Every time I went to Geneva I vowed to myself I would never return to Chamounix again,—I would stay away, nobody should know what had become of me,—perhaps then she would feel some of the old tenderness return; but I could no more have stayed away than can the silly moth from the light, where he will meet his death. I was in a fever until I got back again, where all day long I could dog her footsteps, and where I could spend half the night watching her window. I could not endure companionship, so I would start off and walk miles. The whole place was familiar to me, and my only relief was indulging my bitter thoughts in solitude, while I exhausted my bodily strength, and so at last compelled forgetfulness to come in sleep.

One Thursday I had returned as usual from Geneva, and I must needs go to the *châlet* under pretence of some message to old Antoine the guide, who lived near there. Christine was sitting on the bench in front of the window looking at the road

by which I came from home, but no sooner did I enter than, with a cold nod to me, she told Antoine that she was watching for Monsieur, whose supper was ready; he had gone out sketching, and had not returned. Antoine replied, he would be safer at home, for a storm had been brewing all day, and soon would be here now, whereupon Christine had a thousand fears for Monsieur. He was so fearless, so brave, she could not, she said, but be anxious about him, and she went out into the garden and stood shading her eyes with her hand, as she looked into the distance. Ah! it was too much for me. Before she returned I had gone. What if a storm should come, nothing could rage more fiercely than the passions contending for mastery within me. Madame, perhaps, has never seen a storm in these parts,—they are very fearful for a stranger to witness, and come when the inexperienced feel most secure. The one that soon began to verify Antoine's predictions was not heavy nor particularly dangerous, except to those who did not know their path blindfolded. I was fully alive to every danger, and as soon as I saw bad weather had set in for the night, I made for the best descent into the valley. I was not sorry to know that another ten minutes or so would bring me into the road close

by the village, for the darkness had come quickly, and I could barely see my way. The lightning now and then lit up the path, but there was nothing to fear from that. The rain began to fall heavily, and made the way unsure and slippery. Well, a few minutes more and I should be at the blessed crucifix, which pointed the way to the *Chemin de la Croix*. Just at that moment a groan reached me. I listened, not sure it was not the sighing of the wind; but no,—there it was again, and close by me, too. You may be sure I was not long in finding that it came from some one who had fallen while getting down the same path I was descending; and as I peered into the face of the prostrate man, to my surprise it was Monsieur Laurence! I roughly asked him how he came there. No answer, only a faint moan. He was evidently insensible. “Poor puny creature,” I thought, “to be frightened as a woman might be, because the wind blows and the lightning spreads itself over the sky. Why, Christine would have laughed while battling with such a storm.” How I despised him and gloried in my own strength; and then the devil, who had been close to me all the evening, entered into my heart and said, “Let him lie there and die like a dog; why should you

help him? Has he not robbed you of every happiness and laughed at your distress? He will take away Christine to his own land, and perhaps ill-treat her, neglect her. Pass on your way as though you saw him not. You do Christine good service to let him be: she will soon forget him, and will be yours again." I hesitated. Should I do this,—this crime? "Crime!" sneered the tempter; "I have put revenge in your way, will you be afraid to accept it?" So I left him, and without stopping ran down the steep bit of path, and jumped from the block of stone, that marked it to us villagers, into the road before the blessed cross, and then I stopped. I had never passed it without saluting it, never, on such a night as this, without stopping for a minute to say a prayer for such as might not be near home. I turned and began, "Vive Jésus, vive sa croix;" but the words choked me. I could not hear them for a voice that seemed to come from the blessed image and cry, "Where is thy brother?" I quailed before the next sheet of lightning, and hid my face, for fear I should see reproach and wrath on that sacred face which seemed animated into life, and He pitying me, and knowing the tempter's strength, sent my good angel with power from Himself



to baffle the demon within me, and in as quick a time as I tell this I was flying back to help my rival. No sound this time, but instinct guided me, and I thanked God when I knelt down beside him ; but,—ah, Heaven!—my horror to find he did not breathe, that he was cold and motionless. Madame sees I am strong, but remorse and terror gave me a giant's strength. I lifted him as best I could, and when I found still no signs of life, my heart stood still. Oh, the agony I endured as I carried him down the pathway ! I never felt his weight. What would anything be, when compared with the burden that would weigh on my soul if he were dead ? I never stopped to think, to reason,—I only felt I was a murderer, and when again I reached the blessed cross I laid him before it and cried for mercy, that I might not go forth as Cain. Oh, if the sainted Mary, the holy Benoit, St Pierre, Paul, Catherine, Agnes would plead for me, I would vow never to think of Christine again ! I would pray that she should marry him ; I would leave Chamounix ; I would make a pilgrimage to every station on each of the mountains : the whole bitterness of my heart seemed turned against myself, and I felt I would give my life for his whom I had just before hated

with all the strength of love and jealousy, and with these feelings still upon me I heard a sound, and—oh, joy! he spoke. It was in his own language, but never was music so sweet to me! I believe I laughed, and cried, and hugged him, all in one moment and in one breath, for was it not a miracle that the blessed Saviour had wrought for me? Had He not shown me there was a worse thing could come upon me than losing my hope of happiness in this world? If the earth had been mine, with all Christine's love, what enjoyment could I have felt with darkness on my soul and guilt on my conscience? Come now what would, I could bear it, and I would place a guard over myself that the demon, who had so nearly destroyed me, should not get the mastery again. These resolves were made as I helped and carried Monsieur Laurence to the *châlet*, and heard the story of his accident: he had been up the mountain-side just a little way, putting down some of the glorious colours of the setting sun; it commenced raining, and in descending he had fallen, and he feared broken his ankle, then the exertion of trying to reach the road had obliged him to stop, and he had fainted from the pain, and remembered no more until he thought himself near a mad man, so excessive was my joy. Ah!

it was a simple thing when told by him, but I alone knew how thankful I had cause to be.

‘When we reached Madame Simond’s she and Christine were in great anxiety about Monsieur Laurence. Old Antoine had gone to make inquiries as to where he had last been seen, that they might search for him. Christine and I quite forgot, in our excitement of trying to ease the poor sufferer, that lately we had passed each other with disdain and coldness. Madame Simond was so clever, that she could tell the foot was only badly sprained, and no doctor was fortunate enough to possess such specifics as she knew of. When we had got him to his room, and Madame sat attending to him, then Christine and I began to remember our recent behaviour, and this made us give each other but a cold “good night.” I felt all my love so strong within me, that I dared not trust myself to stay, so I abruptly left the room and stood for a moment in the wooden porch, feeling, as the rain beat in against me, and the wind came sighing from the mountains, how dark the world must henceforth be to me, when the little room I had left contained all the brightness I could ever know in it; and as I stood a presence drew near which I felt, but could not see. Something played

across my cheek more sweet than summer's softest breath, and a voice whispered in my ear, "Benoit, shall we forgive each other?" Ah, Madame, I could not tell you how I answered, nor how all was told, forgiven, forgotten, and our hearts laid bare to one another. Love is a language eloquent to those who hear, full of music from those who speak, but it is a charmed tongue, and if it falls on an ear not attuned it sounds poor and powerless, therefore its words never bear to be repeated; but Madame has listened to that witchery of sound, and will know how ready Christine was to blame herself, and the thousand excuses I could find for her; now I saw that every innocent look and word my jealousy had distorted into coldness and insult.

'When Monsieur Laurence at length returned to Geneva it was late in the autumn. Christine's tears flowed fast at bidding him adieu. But what cared I? I had the right to dry her sweet eyes; and though he was going all the way to England, and I only to Geneva,—to return in three days,—it was to me she turned her fair face for the last good-bye. He and I went to buy her wedding gown, a rare silk, and a present from him. Ah, the empress herself might have envied the

beauty of my Christine on her marriage morn. She never but once again looked so surpassingly fair, and that was when the great God, who gave her to me, took her to Himself again. Yes, Madame, I had to part with her. I told you her pretty coquetry was her only fault, and when she laid that aside she was so loving, so tender, kind, and gentle to all, that the angels could spare her from them no longer, and having blessed me with her for six years, one dreary winter they carried her sweet spirit away and left me sad and very lonely. Pardon, Madame, the boys Laurent and Henri are mine, but their mother was not Christine: no. After some time I married again; I love my wife truly; we have shared many sorrows and blessings together, and I have no right to complain. My life has been as peaceful as is good for me, but I never pass the blessed cross of Arveiron without remembering my sore temptation and the mercy that was shown me there; and when I feel careworn and cast down, I go to our little churchyard, and kneeling before the simple wooden cross which marks *her* grave, invisible hands seem to lift the burden from my heart, which grows fresh and young again; and so keenly do I feel

her presence, that when I have stretched out my arms I have heard the rustle of an angel's wings as I murmured softly, "Christine."'

## YOUNG TOM'S GREY HAIRS.

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### I.



THE quaint old-fashioned village of Chad's End was always declared by sailors to stand alone in the world. Those who boasted they had sailed round the globe maintained with pride that they had never seen the like of Chad's End. Strangers called it ugly and dirty. As they toiled up the hills they wondered how people could live in a place that so smelt of fish, seaweed, and old rope; but the inhabitants dearly loved their old village and its rugged surroundings. They were glad when the thought came across them that when they rested from their labours they should be laid where the salt sea would sometimes wash their graves; and they

gazed lovingly at the little church, the sight of whose tower had often made their brave hearts send up a thankful prayer that 'He had brought them again to the desired haven.'

The coast round Chad's End was bleak and dangerous. Big black rocks stood out jagged and defiant; the waves dashed restlessly and cruelly against the shining white pebbles,—not making sweet melody, but moaning as if they told sad stories of wrecked mariners and drowning men, whose wives waited vainly for the glad tidings that their man's ship had rounded 'the Minsters.'

One long straggling street composed the village, and at the top of it stood the only inn to be met with for many miles round. It was a comfortable, cheery looking house, inviting you to enter directly you saw its diamond-paned windows, and its red curtain so disposed as to show a blazing fire, with an oak settle on one side of it, and a large wooden easy-chair on the other. And if in that chair facing the window you met the good-tempered, motherly face of Widow Connor, and passed on thinking you would go elsewhere, why, then, you never deserved to have another opportunity of trying the welcome every comer received at The Fortunes of War.

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Jane Connor's heart was open to every tale of distress, disappointment, joy, or sorrow. She could tell you the history of everybody in the village; and no matter how bad the character some luckless scapegrace had earned, she knew a bit of good about him. The kindly dame loved a gossip, for she was greatly confined to the house by the gout, which of late years had taken firm hold of her, and threatened sometimes to leave her hands and feet useless.

The stranger who is now sitting on the settle has led her into conversation, and received her usual confidences in such cases. 'Yes, my dear, I've been a widow now up twenty years. I was left with three of 'em; my poor Tim was lost off the 'Culvers. You see, though we had this house, a man don't like to be tied to the shore when he's been used to the sea. So Tim went shares in a little coaster, and every time he came on shore he used to say, "I sha'n't go agin, Jenny." But, law! I knew what that was worth, and three months after he'd think he'd have just one more cruise. And at last, blessed dear, he went once too often, and he and his mate never was heard of after they were seen to leave Havant. The Lord give rest to them the sea's keeping for us, for my two boys

lie in it. One died off Spain, and the other was drowned in sight of Chad's End tower, trying to save the crew of a ship. Ah! yes, I have had my trials, but the Almighty's ways ain't our ways, and I'd rather know they're safe in His keeping than be like many a poor fellow I see, who makes my heart ache for his mother's sake, and to whom I'm tender for the feeling that comes up, that though God took my dear ones, I have been spared any shame for them. And so have you, too, Mr Parker,' adds the widow, as a bluff old man with a wooden leg stumps in. 'I've been telling this gentleman my troubles, and I say, though I've lost my poor boys, perhaps I've been spared sorrows. But you can thank the Lord for sparing your boy, and making him the pride of Chad's End.'

'Avast there, mate,' answered the old man; 'Chad's End has but one pride, and that's my Polly.'

'Only hark to him,' laughed Mrs Connor with a delighted face; 'now you wouldn't think he was speaking of my daughter, would you, sir?'

The stranger said he could quite imagine her daughter making any one enthusiastic, but he should like to see the young lady.

‘Oh! don’t call her that, bless her heart! she’s the best girl mother ever had; though I don’t hold with her head being turned by her being called the “pride of Chad’s End,” but men are so foolish, and old Tom is just mazed about her. I tell him he’d better leave her alone, for it’s best for young folks to manage their own affairs. But you see he has a son—’ Before Mrs Connor could give any more particulars the old man came back, with a pretty, saucy-looking girl, of two or three and twenty, whose bright eyes and rosy colour might well have made her the pride of any place. Just now, however, she was looking rather pouting, and out of temper; and no sooner did she see a stranger near her mother, than she was off before he could get a good look at her. Old Tom called, ‘Polly! Polly!’ but to no purpose; and then he turned a rueful face to the widow.

‘Well, I’ve put my foot in it again. They two,’ with a nod towards the door, ‘have had a bit of a breeze, and I thought I’d come up and see if I couldn’t put ’em on the right tack again; but I’ve missed stays somehow.’

‘Why, what’s the matter now? I thought Polly seemed put out last night,’ replied her mother.

'Oh, the old story! there never was true love without jealousy; and ever since the *Crocodile* has been here, Polly has been more taken up with sailors than ever; and what with her being so run after by them, and smiling on some in particular, and jeering a bit at Tom because he's a landsman, the poor fellow is regularly down, and wishes he was anywhere rather than in Dawson and Glegg's office, though he thought it a fine thing at the time. Ah!' continued the old man, rubbing his wooden leg in perplexity, 'I wish I'd taken Captain Keppel's advice, and put him in the navy. Why, with my interest, he'd have been a second master now. This is the way it lies,' he said, turning to the stranger, 'Tom never took to a seafaring life. He was always more for books. Things I could never make out or see anything in, would catch his fancy. Then he's a great hand at singing, and our parson, and the doctor, and all the gentry round, was always saying he ought to be put somewhere where he'd turn out something. So they got him this berth at Kingsford; but I wish now he had been a sailor. That would have made a man of him.'

'A man of him, indeed!' retorted the widow, indignantly; 'and who, I should

like to know, but his ungrateful old father would dare to say he wasn't as brave a man as ever trod in shoe leather? Who jumped over and saved Fanny Wilkins's child? Who was the first to volunteer to go off in the lifeboat to the crew of the *Mary Stuart*? Who tended on the poor sick dears like a woman, when the cholera was so bad? Fie upon you, Tom Parker, and on Polly, too; because *you* happen to have been in a battle or so, you think nobody's got any courage unless they've got a wooden leg; and as for that foolish child, she's caught by the bit of tinselly gold lace and brass buttons. There now, hold your tongue! I love the sailors dearly, but don't you try to make out they're the only men going with brave hearts; because if so, I won't give in while my name is Jane Connor, and your son's is 'Tom Parker.'

'Well, well, missis, you're right; but I wish I hadn't meddled between the two; you see the dance at the Rectory is coming off, and Tom heard of it first, because of getting up the singing. But he wouldn't say nothing about it, thinking that, as one or two of the *Crocodiles* was going on leave, 'twas a pity to hold out any inducement which might prevent 'em. Mind, I put him up to it, and told him to keep all

dark; but, somehow, I feel I've let it out this morning, and Polly's going into action this evening under masked batteries. When she meets Tom she'll look very innocent about the party, he'll think she knows nothing, and will be under a raking fire before he sees how the land lies.'

'What a stupid old fellow you are!' exclaimed the widow, tartly; 'but send Tom up here. Tell him I want him to come to supper, and I'll see what I can do. Polly! Polly!' calling up the stairs, which went out of the room; 'Uncle Parker's gone, and I want you, my dear. This gentleman wishes to stay here for a week or two, to have a bed-room, and to take his meals with us.'

So Miss Polly entered, and the stranger, who had been made acquainted with the history of her and her family, was presented to her. He was a captain of a merchant vessel, and was going on a dangerous expedition for a cargo of skins; and, as he laughingly informed Mrs Connor, he should doubtless rid the village of all the ne'er-do-wells, for of such his crew were generally formed. 'My name is Johnstone, and my ship is the *Nimrod*,' with which information Captain Johnstone left the mother and daughter alone.

The winter afternoon was coming to a

close. You could not see to work or to do anything before tea, which Lydia was getting ready. Polly, therefore, seated herself on the large rug made by her father out of bunting, to represent, to the imaginative eye, a ship under full sail. Leaning her head against the settle, she gazed silently into the fire—quite unconscious that she made a charming study, the glowing flame causing her bright colour to look brighter, and her eyes darker and deeper—and fell into a reverie. Poor Tom, how unhappy he looked when she said that she was a sailor's daughter, and intended, if she ever married, to be a sailor's wife! She wished, though, she had not been so cross to him the night before,—had not made him so jealous. What she chose to say to him was one thing, but she would make that Phil Crofton repent that he had spoken sneeringly of him to her. Well, as soon as tea was over she would run down to Withy Pool. Tom would be sure to be there, and then they would make it up, and she would not be——

Here Mrs Connor broke in upon her daughter's reveries by saying, 'Polly, go and see after *that* Lydia, or we won't get tea to-night; and that poor dear soul will be dying for his tea, for he told me he hadn't had much of a dinner.'

'I wonder you let him stay with us, mother,' said Polly, 'I don't much like his looks.'

'My dear, you mustn't choose folks by their looks, nor parsons by their books; and it must be a sorry heart that wouldn't try and make a poor fellow feel a little home-like when he did come ashore. My meat would choke me to know anybody was sitting in the parlour all lonesome, and nobody to speak to; feeling there wasn't a soul in the world glad to see 'em. No wonder the poor dears take to drink. That hasn't been your mother's way, Polly. "Do unto others as you'd have another do to you," is a good saying; but don't stop there, but do by others as you'd have others do by your folks if they was roaming in foreign lands, nobody knows where.'

All further conversation was put an end to by the entrance of Captain Johnstone himself.

'Well, here you be!' exclaimed the widow in her cheery voice, 'cold enough, I'll be bound; tea's all ready, and I've got a nice bit of hake which you must enjoy; now make yourself at home, my dear; there's no strangers at The Fortunes of War.'

'Why, Mrs Connor,' said the man, 'if



there was more like you, most of your trade would have to shut up their houses.'

'No, they wouldn't,' she returned, 'an open heart needn't shut the door of any house;' and then she commenced inquiring about his voyage, and his ship, and what chance he had of picking up men and completing his crew about Chad's End.

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## II.

AT four o'clock in the afternoon, young Tom Parker closed the office, walked to the ferry, and then trudged his four miles back to Chad's End. Generally he thought nothing of the distance, as he rapidly passed over the well-known road, whistling merrily, troling out snatches of quaint old glees, or sinking his voice a little to 'My Pretty Jane,' 'Tell me, Mary, how to woo thee,' or the 'Pilgrim of Love;' all of which he had sung at the Institute concerts, where he was considered to be second only to a professional. But to-day Tom was tired and dispirited. He had no heart to sing, and indeed had had no heart to do anything. Mr Glegg had praised his work, and spoken of an increase of salary;

but what was the good of that if Polly Connor wouldn't have him? saying before Phil Crofton and Avery that she would only be a sailor's wife? He wished now he had gone to sea. He had a good mind to speak to the Rector about it yet, only he could not tell him about Polly, and it would look so ungrateful after all the pains Mr Raby had taken to get him the situation he was in. What a walk this was to Chad's End. The road seemed three times as long as usual, and it was not, therefore, in the best of humours that Tom reached his home, which was just in the centre of the village.

Old Tom Parker kept the Post-office; and his wife being dead, her sister, Aunt Betsey, was housekeeper to the two men. Aunt Betsey was very deaf; so after she had put the mixed meal of dinner and tea before her nephew, her practice was to seat herself opposite to him, not for sake of conversation, but because Tom would look up two or three times and nod approval of her cookery. Then her face would beam with delight, and she would be quite rewarded for all the trouble she had taken.

To-night she was not at all pleased when Tom laid down his knife and fork. She was beginning to shake her head from side to side, which meant great disappro-

bation on her part, when his father came in.

'Well, Tom, back again? Any news stirring?'

'No, father, not that I've heard; but I've been busy all day.'

'Only look to that,' said Aunt Betsey, holding the half-emptied dish.

'Never mind,' shouted old Tom, putting his hand to his mouth as if he was hailing a distant vessel, 'he's going out to supper, so he must leave a reef slack.' This piece of intelligence brightened up the old woman.

'What do you mean, father, about going out to supper?' inquired Tom.

'Why, Mrs Connor told me to tell you you was to go up to-night; she wants you.'

'I can't go,' said Tom, fancying another dose of the *Crocodile's* men was in store for him. 'I'm too tired to stir out again;' and Tom's heart felt heavier than before.

The old man saw the dark shadow fall on his son's face; so trying to make all right, he said, 'Have a nap, Tom, then you'll be as fresh as paint again. I would go if I was you; there won't be nobody there but the missis and Polly, and it's lonesome evenings up there in winter. Polly'll be disappointed, for she seemed terrible downhearted.'

‘Oh!’—that gave matters quite another turn—‘then I’ll go;’ and Tom rises to smarten himself up a little. Old Tom saw him leave with much pride, chuckling that he had brought matters round so well. Then he closed the door, filled his pipe, and heaving a sigh, wondered whether that blessed angel in heaven, could she look down upon the boy she had died bringing into the world, would be satisfied with the way his old father had tried to do his duty by him.

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### III.

AT The Fortunes of War, no sooner was tea over and cleared away, than Mrs Connor seated herself with her knitting in her hand and her eye on the glass door which led to the bar, Captain Johnstone meanwhile puffing at his pipe as he gave her a lively description of the loss of the *Naworth Castle* and all hands except himself. In came Miss Polly with an intimation that she was just going to run down to the Point, and see if Patience Brewer could come and make her new dress for her next week. Mrs Connor did not quite

approve of Polly's going, knowing that a visit to Patience meant being away for some time; but she gave in at last, after receiving an assurance that Polly would be back before eight o'clock. 'I don't suppose Tom can be here before then,' thought the widow, 'and if he does come I'll tell him Polly said she'd be back in half an hour.'

The winter evening was fresh and cold, and the road was hard and crisp; but Polly didn't mind, for her heart was full of love, and she was certain that at Withy Pool she should see Tom standing leaning over the gate, for Withy Pool was not a pool at all, nor were there any withies there. It was the entrance to a large field, or piece of fenced-off common, after crossing which you descended to Shovel Point, where Patience Brewer lived. There seemed to be a sort of understanding between Tom and Polly that Withy Pool was especially dedicated to forgiveness and the smoothing of their numerous differences. The same little bit of acting was always gone through. Polly, as soon as she turned into the lane, saw Tom leaning over the stile. She always began then to walk very slowly and pretend not to see him, until he would stop her by standing right before her, and saying reproach-

fully, 'Polly, Polly !' She would get very angry, and so would he too sometimes, until suddenly, without knowing a bit how it happened, all was forgotten, and Polly was begging Tom to forgive her, and Tom declaring that he had nothing to forgive—that he was a brute and she was an angel. On this particular evening Polly could not believe her eyes when she had come up close to the gate, and no Tom was there. Perhaps he would come in a minute or two, but she did not want him to think she was waiting for him, so she got behind the stone hedge. But some minutes passed and no sound came but the dull roll of the sea. Oh dear, if he were ill, or anything had happened to him, what should she do? She was certain he would have come, unless some very unlooked-for thing had occurred. What could it be? And now the poor girl began to feel afraid, and to remember how lonely the place was. She had never thought about it before. Being accustomed all her life to the place, and knowing every one around, fear and Polly were strangers. However, to night she dared not cross the field; she must go round by the coast-guard station. So away she ran, not stopping to draw breath, until the long row of black and white houses with

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the little green in front was in sight. Then she fell into a more sober pace, and walked on. There was a knot of men standing round the flagstaff. Polly could see them by the lantern which hung just above their heads.

'Who goes there?' called out one.

'Me, Polly Connor, Mr Bates.' But Polly did not hear Mr Bates' answer, for the little gate bounced open, and Philip Crofton cried—

'I am in luck to-night. Fortune favours the brave; and you'll allow me to see you home.'

Now Philip Crofton was the last person Polly wished to see. She therefore informed him, very curtly, that she was not going home; she was going to see a friend. But Philip Crofton would take no rebuff; he had been having a yarn with his old chum's father, the officer of the station, and he intended going as far as The Fortunes of War when his attraction there—the pretty Polly—hove in sight. To get rid of him being impossible, Polly tried to console herself by making him twice repeat all his love speeches, under pretence first of not having heard them, and then of not having understood what he meant. It went on thus until they reached Patience Brew r's,

and here she wished him 'Good-bye,' advising him not to wait for her, as she intended to stay ever so long. But all to no purpose. Mr Crofton declared that he should not mind waiting hours for her, and Polly was fain to enter and resolve to try and exhaust his patience by sitting in the dressmaker's little back parlour as long as she possibly could; then she would go back through the village, and pretend she had a message for Aunt Betsey. By this means she would ascertain what had become of Tom, about whom her heart felt very sore and heavy.

The clock was striking seven when Tom entered The Fortunes of War. Mrs Connor gave him a hearty welcome, and then inquired if he had met Polly.

'No! Why, how the child must have run! She said she wouldn't be half an hour gone, and you're to sit and have a gossip with me until she comes back.'

Then Tom was introduced to 'Cap'en Johnstone;' and the two men began a discussion on wind and weather, the probability of a war, and the certainty of a good fishing season. But Tom's eyes kept wandering to the old-fashioned clock that stood in the corner. He fixed his attention so earnestly on the mimic ship, which with every tick rolled on a cloud of foamy

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billow, that the widow was fain at length to wonder what was keeping Polly.

'Why, where has she gone to?' asked Tom.

'Oh! down to Patience Brewer's about a new frock for this dance at the Rector's; and once they two get together there's no getting them separated.'

Gone to Patience Brewer's! Why, that meant Withy Pool; how stupid of him not to have gone there first! Perhaps Polly was waiting there in the cold and the darkness; so up he jumped.

'I'll go and fetch her home, Mrs Connor. I didn't know she'd gone to the Point.'

'Now you'd much better stop where you be, my dear; you'll go boxing the compass after her, and you'll miss each other at last.'

'No, no, I sha'n't,' said Tom. 'I know which way she is sure to come; and if I do miss her, it won't take me long to get back;' and off he went, as fast as he could walk, to Withy Pool. But no Polly was there. She had tired of waiting, and had gone on to Shovel Point, knowing that he would go after her. It did not take him long to get across the bit of common land, nor down the narrow, stony lane which led to the flat piece known as 'The Shovel,' at

the edge of which lived old Brewer. Tom was in such haste that he found himself right in front of another person. To his great surprise, who should this be but Phil Crofton!

'Halloo, Parker! anybody would think the pressgang was at your heels, you're in such a hurry. What are you doing here?'

'I don't know that that's any business of yours,' replied Tom sharply. 'Suppose I return the question—What are *you* doing here?'

'Well, if I was taking a quarter-deck walk on the Shovel on my own account, I shouldn't mind confiding to you the whole of my motives; but "when a lady's in your string, why it's quite another thing;" and I am waiting for "woman, lovely woman," who is engaged with another of the fair sex on the subject of toggery.'

'You are lying!' exclaimed Tom, in hot anger.

'Perhaps so,' said Crofton calmly, 'but not *under a mistake* at present. My dear fellow, I feel for you; but as two are company, wouldn't it be as well for you to go back at once, and meditate on that moral precept, "Every dog has his day?"'

Poor Tom! his great fault was his quick temper, which had lately been sorely

tried, and now threatened to blaze up and master him. He waited a moment, stung to madness by the insolent assurance of the man whom he thought was his favoured rival, and then by a violent effort he said, 'Crofton, I want to ask you, are you waiting for Polly Connor, and did you come here with her? Answer me at once.'

Philip Crofton felt very uncomfortable; but it wouldn't do to get the worst of it now, so he replied surlily, 'I've no right to answer your questions, but still *I am* waiting for Miss Connor, and *I did* come here with her.'

'Once more,' said Tom, huskily; 'where did you meet her?'

'*Where* did I meet her!' he replied, 'why, where I expected to meet her—at the coast-guard station.'

Tom did not utter another syllable; he was gone before the last word was well out. Philip Crofton looked after him, and then said to himself, 'I hate doing a dirty trick, but it strikes me I've done one to-night. I do feel uncommonly sweet, though, on the girl; and "all's fair in love and war." But here she comes;' and he stepped towards her.

'Really, Mr Crofton,' exclaimed Polly, crossly, 'I wonder you force your company where it's not wanted. I am going

into the village to see Aunt Betsey, so we had better say good night at once.'

Oh, then she wanted to see Tom. That would never do to-night; and jealousy making him feel a little spiteful, he answered, 'Are you sure it's Aunt Betsey or her nephew you're running after?'

'Running after! Mr Crofton, I'll trouble you to be more careful what you say to me.'

'Oh! no offence meant; only I thought I might save you the trouble of going, for I saw Parker looking after a pretty petticoat some time ago.'

Polly was struck speechless.

'Come, take my arm,' said Philip, tenderly; 'you are cold. Don't go into the village to-night; and let me see you home. I won't go in, I'll only go to the door.'

As they walked on, and she still complained of the chill wind, he wrapped her shawl carefully round her; and Tom, watching behind a stone-heap to see if Crofton's words were true, saw Polly leaning on his arm, he bending down talking to her.

When Polly returned home, Philip Crofton with her—it was long past eight o'clock—and Mrs Connor was not in the

best of tempers. Supper was all ready, and a very nice supper too. No sooner did the widow see who was her daughter's escort than she leaped to the conclusion that Tom had seen them together, and had absented himself in a fit of jealousy. But catching her daughter's penitent eyes, the good old soul's anger vanished, and she thought, 'The Lord forgive me for not being grateful that all her faults lie in her head and not in her heart.' And then she turned to Polly with—'Why don't you ask Mr Crofton to sit down, Polly? he isn't going without his supper.' The young man made some excuses, but the widow would not have them; and an hour after, when poor Tom stole up, unable to keep away longer, he saw Philip Crofton quite at home, telling Captain Johnstone some story that made Mrs Connor laugh till the tears stood in her eyes; Polly at the same time being seated on the rug inside the circle, looking contented and happy, while he was outside in the cold, with his heart breaking.

Oh! why was Fate so cruel? If he had been a sailor, full of fun and jollity, like Crofton, perhaps she would have loved him. The night was not more dark than life looked to him now. What was it to him that his salary was raised, that he

should become head clerk, nay, that he should become Dawson and Glegg, since Polly was resolved to marry only a sailor? Was it too late to go to sea now? Would she wait for him?

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#### IV.

FOR the next week poor old Tom Parker could not think what had come over his boy. He didn't speak, or laugh, or eat: in vain did Aunt Betsey compound her most dainty dishes: they were left almost untouched; and the worst of it was that there was no comfort in Polly. She flirted more outrageously than ever with the *Crocodile's* men, and never seemed to care whether Tom was living or dead. Mrs Connor was confined to her bed with an attack of gout, and old Tom declared himself to the Rector, when he called for his letters, to be regularly 'down on his luck.'

'You see, sir,' he said, 'I've set my mind on seeing them two spliced; and when I see Tom sitting moping here of an evening, and a lot of chaps philandering up there, why, I know all isn't plain sailing.'

' Ah, well, Parker, my gathering is next Tuesday, and they'll make up their quarrels there. Why, she'll be so proud of Tom's singing that she'll rejoice in him, and they'll go home like turtle-doves.'

So for the next week nothing was talked of but the party at the Rectory. There was to be a concert first, and Mrs Raby and Lady Jane and Sir William and the young ladies would sing, and Tom would be in the middle of it all. But Tom had a very heavy heart during all these festive arrangements. He was too busy to follow Polly about; but he generally contrived to hear that Avery had been seen with her, or that Phil Crofton had boasted of being sure of his promotion when the ship was paid off, and knew somebody who wouldn't get married till then.

He always passed Withy Pool on his way to the Rectory, but though he lingered by the gate, Polly never came. Not that she was by any means indifferent to Tom's apparent coldness and sulkiness. Many a night after she had laughed, and flirted, and teased her numerous admirers (knowing that Tom would have it all retailed to him), poor Polly cried herself to sleep, thinking she had lost Tom's love for ever. Patience Brewer gave it out in the village

that she was certain Polly Connor had made up her mind to be married, for she didn't care a bit how her dress was made, and wouldn't have had new ribbons, only her mother made her.

It was most unfortunate for the lovers that Mrs Connor happened to be laid up. If that worthy dame had been about she would soon have set things straight; but the gout drove all lovers' quarrels out of her head, and Polly even forgot her troubles in trying to ease her mother's pains. She begged to be allowed to stay with her, and not go to the party, as she was sure she should not enjoy it a bit.

'How could I, mother? You in bed, and suffering as you do; I would very much rather remain at home.'

But Mrs Connor would not hear of such a thing. Why, it would do her all the good in the world to hear of all their doings, and who the Rector led off with. 'I mind the time,' she went on, 'when I stood to the top with the Rector, and your father was at the bottom with Mrs Raby. She was a bride then, and chose my Tim amongst all the men for her partner. Dear heart! there wasn't his fellow in the room. I can see his handsome face now, as he looked up to me, knowing it would please his Jenny. No, no, child, go and enjoy



yourself, and come home and tell your old mother how happy you've been ; and that'll be more than all the doctor's physic to her.'

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## V.

AT last the eventful evening came, and Polly was dressed, and waiting for Uncle Parker and Aunt Betsey, who were to form her escort. She had undergone her mother's inspection, and Mrs Connor had forgotten the gout while she pulled this ribbon out, or made that bow longer or shorter as her taste suggested. There was no occasion for the old people to come in, for Polly ran down and met them at the door, where Lydia gave her a beautiful nosegay that Mr Crofton had just left for her. Then, with her muslin dress pinned daintily round her, and well wrapped up in her shawl, away the trio started.

Tom, of course, had gone long before. Mr Dawson had given him a holiday, that he might assist in putting up the decorations. Accordingly, he had been at the Rectory all day, only running home to dress himself. Old Tom was in a state of

great excitement, and stumped away in front of the two women, telling them he knew they should be all behindhand. As for Polly, her teeth chattered with nervous excitement, so that it was quite delightful to find herself before the great wood fire of the room where they took off their wraps.

Here there were several girls whom they knew; and after the usual 'Oh! Mary, am I all right?' 'Carrie, will you pin on this bow?' 'Polly, my dear, is my cap straight?' old Tom's anxious face appeared at the door, and the party went off to have some tea before entering the concert room.

Did any one ever look so bewitching as Polly did to Tom that night? He watched her speaking to the Rector and his lady; he saw Lady Jane and some gentlemen she was talking to smile their approbation; and he felt more than ever, that come what might he could not give her up. Polly saw the passionate gaze of love that met her eyes, but though her heart gave a great bound of delight, the little gipsy looked coldly away, thinking triumphantly,—'So, he's coming round, after all.'

And now that the singing was begun, it was a treat to witness the applause each piece drew forth; the spontaneous demand every now and then for an *encore*, the beam-

ing faces of the mothers and fathers of the choir children, and the congratulatory nods of the rest of the audience. But nothing was more delightful than the faces of old Tom and Aunt Betsey. The moment young Tom stood up, they looked at each other, and then never took their eyes off him again. The poor old woman seemed to listen with every feature, and at the end of each verse would turn to her neighbour with 'Wonderful! I never can hear nothing else, but I never lose a word when my boy sings.' The duet with Lady Jane—'Pray, Goody, please to moderate,' was a wonderful success; but the crowning triumph of the evening was 'Black-eyed Susan.' And when—finding nothing would still the enthusiasm but another song, the Rector made Tom stand up again, and give, 'Tell me, Mary, how to woo thee?' every eye turned at once to Polly, who sat blushing rosy red, unable to resist the tremulous tone of the voice, every note of which found an echo in her heart.

Tom had to stay and help Captain Raby and some of the gentlemen to arrange the room for dancing. By the time he reached the supper-table Miss Polly was surrounded with admirers, and, carried away by excitement, love of fun, and the knowledge that she was the belle of the

evening, she was enjoying herself to her full desire. The young Squire, Sir William's son, had secured her hand for 'The Triumph;' and Colonel Egerton, Lady Jane's brother, had said, quite loud, before them all, 'I hope "the Flower of Chad's End" has not forgotten me, and will honour me by dancing "Sir Roger" with me.'

All the *Crocodile's* men were there, and several young farmers who from time to time came to The Fortunes of War; so that a wiser head than Polly's might well have been turned by the attention and admiration she was receiving.

Tom would have given all he possessed to be able to speak to her, but he could not summon up courage to do so, seeing that Philip Crofton stood so close by her. Polly, on the other hand, having made sure that Tom would come up and ask her for a dance directly he came in, felt disappointed and angry at his remaining at the other end of the table. When a move was at length made, and Tom got near enough to ask her what dance she would give him, she replied coldly that she did not know now whether she had one to spare, and if she had it wouldn't be until quite late. Before another word could be spoken the fiddlers began to tune up, the young Squire came and said that he had

been looking for her ; while Philip Crofton leaned over with a loud whisper, 'The next is mine, remember.'

'The Triumph' came to an end at last, and the Rector seated himself beside his partner, his jocund face beaming with pleasure. The only person who had no enjoyment was Tom, who was kept in a fever of jealousy. When, after repeated solicitation, his dance did come off, his temper was anything but amiable. Instead of expressing all the love that filled his heart, he reproached Polly for being heartless and unkind, and trying purposely to avoid him ; while she, holding up her nosegay to her face (to pretend indifference, but really to hide the tears that would come into her eyes), so provoked him that, guessing whose flowers they were, and losing all self-command, he rudely pushed aside the bouquet ; it fell to the ground, and the next couple trod upon it, and crushed it. Then Polly's anger blazed up. It was in vain for Tom to say it was an accident. She knew that he meant to do it, and she would not have any more to say to him ; it was just like the cowardly trick of a landsman. Yet as 'Sir Roger' struck up, and as she turned away with Colonel Egerton, she answered his inquiry, whether she had lost

her bouquet, with—‘Yes, in dancing, it was knocked out of my hand; but it doesn’t matter at all, for the flowers were all faded.’

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## VI.

It was the evening after the Rectory dance, and the *Nimrod* was to sail the next day. Captain Johnstone sat before the parlour fire meditatively smoking his pipe. He had made up his complement of men to his satisfaction, and now only wanted a fellow to keep the crew alive when they got ‘in the suds’—a chap who could tune up a bit, and sing a good song with a chorus. He himself knew nothing of home, the parish of Hull having apprenticed him to a whaler when he was ten years old, yet he never felt so sorry to leave any place as he did *The Fortunes of War*, and motherly *Widow Connor*; and he made up his mind that when he came back he would bring the old dame a good long fur boa, and her pretty daughter a nice muff—

‘For,’ said he to himself, ‘they’ve somehow made me feel different—a bit ashamed

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of two or three things. I've done in my day; and I have a sort of wish I was a better man, and had somebody to care for.'

Here the captain's pensive reflections were interrupted by the entrance of Tom Parker, who, pale and haggard, asked him if Polly was at home.

'Yes, she's aloft with the missis. Do you want her?'

Tom hesitated. He did not like to tell Johnstone his troubles, but he was almost beside himself, for Polly, being determined to punish him for his late sulkiness, and the jealousy and ill-temper he had shown at the Rector's, had said every hard and bitter thing she could think of—had refused to walk home with him, and before his very eyes had accepted Crofton's arm. All the evening he had been hanging about the house, trying to speak to her; and at last had grown desperate and determined to see her alone. So upon Captain Johnstone again asking if he should cry up and say Polly was wanted, Tom mustered courage to ask him to pretend he wanted her, and then let him speak to her alone. The captain looked at him for a moment, and then went to the foot of the stairs and called up, 'Miss Polly, can you step down for a moment? I want to speak to you.' On her answer-

ing in the affirmative, he took up his hat and informed Tom that he would 'cool his heels outside for a little while, and see which way the wind blew.'

Polly had just been describing the loss of her nosegay to her mother; and on Mrs Connor taking Tom's part, and declining to agree with her daughter that he had done it on purpose, the young lady had worked herself into an aggrieved state again. She was thus in no temper to hear any of Tom's apologies, although her heart smote her when she saw his pale face. Still, when Tom came forward and said, 'Oh, Polly, how unkind you are!' just echoing what she had heard from her mother, she blazed up again, until Tom declared he would leave the place and never come back again.

'And the best thing you could do. If I were a man, do you think I'd be pop-injay enough to stick at home all my life? No, I'd see the world, and then I shouldn't be quarrelling always with women, and showing off my tempers to people who can't return it.'

'Then you wish me to go to sea, Polly?'

'I don't care where you go; it's nothing to me.'

'Polly,' exclaimed Tom, his lips get-



ting white, 'I'll take you at your word. If you don't care for me, I don't care for myself, nor what becomes of me. Good-bye; you'll never see me again.'

'Indeed! sha'n't I? Then good-bye, Mr Parker,' and Polly never looked up, but tightened her little mouth, and gazed resolutely into the fire. The door slammed, and Tom was gone. She jumped up, and cried, 'Oh! Tom, Tom!' but he did not come back. Surely he couldn't mean what he had said; he was only in a passion. Never see him again! Then, forgetting the hard words she had used, she burst into tears, crying, 'Tom, how could you be so cruel to me?'

When Tom left Polly he hurried down the lane. Half way he came suddenly upon Captain Johnstone, who was performing a double shuffle, partly to warm himself, and partly to while away the time.

'Halloo!' he said, 'here you are again. Well, have you squared your reckoning up there?'

'Yes,' said Tom, 'and I want to know if you'll give me a berth on board the *Nimrod*?'

'Whew!' exclaimed the captain, with a prolonged whistle, 'that's the way the land lies.'

'I know,' continued Tom, 'I can't be

of much use, but I could keep your books, write up the log, and turn my hand to anything, until I get more used to sea ways.'

'Well, I don't know that I have much call for a quill-driver, and we don't want more cats than can kill mice; but'—regarding him seriously—'you can scrape a bit on the fiddle, can't you?'

'Yes,' answered Tom.

'And sing a song or two?'

'Yes.'

'Then, by the piper, you're the man for me.'

'You mustn't tell any one that I am going,' said Tom; 'not that anybody will care much except my father, and God forgive me for breaking his heart.'

'Mum shall be the word with me; but you don't think you'll show the white feather when the time comes? We rather rough it aboard our craft; and sail as soon after daybreak to-morrow as we can.'

Tom promised to meet him the next morning on 'the hard' at half past five o'clock; and having sealed their compact with a shake of the hand, they parted, Tom resolving to wander about until his father should leave for the club he attended every Friday evening. Then he would enter the house, tell Aunt Betsey that he

was tired, and request her not to call him early. He would go up to his bed-room at once, for he could not meet the old man again. He would write to Mr Dawson and ask forgiveness for leaving, pack up a few things, and address a line to Polly to tell her he had gone. Having wandered down to Withy Pool, meditating thus, the memory of happy meetings there caused his desolation to come upon him, and throwing himself upon the grass, he sobbed aloud.

Next morning Lydia and Jim, the factotum at *The Fortunes of War*, were astir betimes, for Mrs Connor wouldn't hear of Captain Johnstone going off without his breakfast. She had had a nice basket packed for him with some meat pasties, a loaf of home-made bread, and a jar of potted pilchards. And early as it was, she was awake. So at five o'clock, the last thing before he left, though he had bade them good-bye the night before, he ran up once more to her door, 'Good-bye to you again, Mrs Connor.'

'Good-bye, my dear, a safe voyage to 'e, and God hold your soul and body in His keeping.'

'Amen to that,' said the sailor, huskily, 'I haven't been a good man, missis, but I'll try and be a better one, if it's only

to make me more fit for the company of such good women as you.'

On the beach he was met by Tom and two or three of his crew on whom he could depend, and who had therefore been permitted 'to splice the main brace' ashore. These men were still in a very hazy condition, and poor Tom looked with dismay on his future companions. He already half repented his hasty resolution; and by the time the boat reached the little vessel he would have given the world to be ashore. But there was little time for regret, for Tom had to work pretty hard, —the half-sobered crew being too muddled to be of much service. At last the *Nimrod* was under weigh; the lazy sails ceased flapping and allowed the gentle breeze, which was springing up, to fill them. Poor Tom! He felt that if the sea would only swallow them while the dear old place was in sight he should be happy.

'I say, messmate, you're looking about as lively as a gib cat,' said a voice which came from Captain Johnstone. 'Come, man, cheer up. Why, this voyage will put new life in you, and when you return the pretty Polly will welcome you "like the flowers of May." You thought that fellow Crofton was cutting you out. Bless you! he might as well have "cast sheep's

eyes" at the old woman for all Miss Polly cared for his philandering. If I was a good-looking young fellow like you, and a wind-jammer into the bargain, it would be a mighty smart fellow who'd take the wind out of my sails in the eye of the woman I'd set my heart upon. So brisk up, youngster, you'll weather the master's mate yet, though he wears the Queen's gilt button. This will be a prosperous voyage, as sure as my name's Jack Johnstone, and when we come back, this time next year, mark my words, you'll be made mate of the pretty Polly, and I'll stand treat for the wedding dinner.'

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## VII.

OLD Tom was never more puzzled in his life than he was that morning; for while he was sorting the letters, he came upon one addressed to Miss Connor, which was certainly in Tom's handwriting. 'But whenever could he have writ it? I never seed him, and he isn't one to do it in working hours.' The idea of any one writing, when they could speak, seemed marvellous to old Tom, for when he wrote a letter, it

was a perfect labour, and after 'as it leaves me at present,' he always felt the strongest desire to take off his coat. He thoroughly inspected this epistle, held it at a distance, and then close to him, finally asking Joe Spry, the postman, if he did not think that that letter was written by his Tom. Joe had no hesitation in declaring that 'he'd say Yes before a jury,' and went off to deliver the contents of his bag, leaving the old man in a state of perplexity as to 'what was up now.'

In the middle of his cogitation, Aunt Betsey came in with a bewildered face, to tell him that she had been up to call Tom (as it was past eight o'clock), and that he was not there.

'Wasn't where?'

'Why, he wasn't in his bed.'

What could have happened? He felt quite uneasy. It was so unlike Tom to go off and never say a word. Then that letter—a spasm of fear shot through him—but no. Perhaps he had had to go to work early, and had written to Polly to say so; or he might have been too tired to explain things to Aunt Betsey last night. Perhaps he told her to call him early, and she made a mistake; it was so foolish of deaf people to pretend they heard when they didn't.

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The old man communicated his suspicions to Aunt Betsey, but she scouted the idea. 'Not know what Tom meant! Not be sure that he said he should go to bed, for he was very tired, and she wasn't to call him early! Yes, she was quite sure, and he spoke very short; and she noticed he looked as white as a ghost, as well he might, traipsing about at everybody's beck and call all the afternoon, and dancing all night.'

Old Tom wouldn't give in, though; he had made up his mind that Aunt Betsey had made a mistake; and they were just getting warm in the argument when in rushed Polly, without hat or shawl, her face all pale and scared. Catching the old man by the arm, she cried, 'He's gone, he's gone!'

'Gone! What—where! Who's gone?'

'Tom,' gasped out Polly, breathless. '*Nimrod*—sailed—the tower.' In another moment Aunt Betsey was left standing petrified, while Polly, half dragging old Tom, made for the tower.

The morning mist had passed away, leaving its tears on new-made graves and long-forgotten dead. Each rock stood out sharp and clear. Above, the grey old tower of the church held guard over those whose homes were now under its shadow;

while below the sea glittered, cold and rippling. Two figures watched with eager eyes the Point, which they knew a ship would soon round, then to be lost to sight for years; perhaps for ever. The girl felt as if that was her only chance, her last glimpse of happiness. Silently she stood—rapt, intent, grasping old Tom's hand; the pressure tightening as the bow of a vessel came in sight. Then her lips parted, her breath was held within her, her very soul seemed to come into her eyes, with a yearning love that made her stretch out her arms as if the spirit of Tom, who she knew was gazing upon the spot, could fly hither and find rest. Slowly—slowly—gone! and, with a cry of agony, Polly fell into the old man's arms, and sobbed out her tears of despair.

Very soon all Chad's End knew that Polly Connor's flirting ways had driven poor Tom Parker away from home, to be wrecked and drowned most likely with the cut-throats who had sailed in the *Nimrod*. They knew further, that Polly did nothing now but fret and mope and look as scared as a ghost. She did not care who knew this, for she had spoken out boldly before all the *Crocodiles*; and said that she loved Tom Parker with all her heart, and that if he ever returned she would go down on her



bended knees and beg him to forgive her ; and if he wouldn't marry her (which she didn't expect he would do, being a great deal too good for her), why then she would remain an old maid all the days of her life. Her only delight was in old Tom ; with him she would sit by the hour, the old man going over the wonderful sayings and doings of young Tom, when he was a boy, showing her his copy-books, exhibiting his prizes, and making Polly read over the inscriptions upon them a dozen times.

The months went by, and Tom's sudden disappearance began to be forgotten. The violets and primroses scented the hedges, the samphire clothed the rocks, and all nature rejoiced in spring. Winter was forgotten, and junketings began to be talked of. Polly's eyes were as bright and her colour as rosy as when she flirted with Phil Crofton, and drove poor Tom to despair. The gossips shook their heads when they heard her merry laugh, and said, 'Soon hurt, soon healed.' The girls who envied her pretty face scorned the idea that she was still constant to Tom, urging that it was always 'out of sight, out of mind' with Polly Connor. But the young men, her would-be lovers, knew that a change had come over her. They might go up to The Fortunes of War every evening if they

pleased; and, as long as her mother was present, Polly would laugh and joke and 'be as merry as a grig;' but the moment they tried to urge their suit she grew grave, and told them *no* at once. She said she had no love to give them, for her heart was Tom Parker's. And when one of them had suggested that perhaps Tom would never return, that he might be dead even, she burst into a passion of tears, exclaiming that she was then a murderess, and no wife for any man.

What agonies of fear poor Polly had known all through these months, when the winds strove and the sea battled! Many a time when a customer would say, 'Twill be a dirty night,' Polly would run breathless to old Tom's, and, kneeling with her face hidden on his shoulder, beg him to assure her that it 'wasn't likely the wind was blowing so fiercely where *he* was.'

'No, no, my lass!' the old man would say, 'let's hope not; but if so be it should, remember them blessed words writ for sailors especial, "When they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, he delivereth them out of their distress. For he maketh the storm to cease: so that the waves thereof are still."' '

When his boy went, the light of old

Tom's life had gone. But he never reproached Polly, nor allowed others to do so in his presence. What passed between them in the little churchyard the morning the *Nimrod* sailed none ever knew; but henceforth a bond held the two together which nothing seemed likely ever to sunder.

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## VIII.

It is nearly eighteen months since the *Nimrod* sailed out of Chad's End. Her return cargo of skins is not yet made up. Tom looks brown and weatherbeaten now. He has a bend in his shoulder, which tells of a low cabin and a short berth; but, greatest change of all, his hair is fast turning grey. He has sent several letters to his father, but as they have generally been intrusted to pilots or home-bound vessels, he is not at all sure that they have ever been received. 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and few, after the first month or so, guessed what anguish of spirit he went through. He had wrestled with despair, and had conquered. Now things were looking brighter. Tom was Captain John-

stone's right-hand, and had been the means of restraining that unscrupulous 'son of Neptune' from doing many an action which did not accord with Tom's sense of common fairness. The captain would often swear and bluster and hold out for a time; but, in the end, he would give in, exclaiming, 'Ah! what it is to have a good figger-head,' for he held that portion of Tom's person in great admiration, often saying, 'it wasn't large, but its stowage was wonderful.'

With the crew Tom was a general favourite. When they found that, notwithstanding his outspoken censure of a ribald jest, he was as cool in danger as those from whose lips it fell, they paid attention to him; and for a tune on the fiddle or a good song, they would listen to words which they would not have tolerated from another, and which, doubtless, would come back to them in after years with healing sound.

The cruise had been a prosperous one, and the *Nimrod* would soon sail for England, laden with skins which would fetch, as the captain said, 'a pot of money.' 'And I've put by an ermine muff for Miss Polly, which she may wear to church; for, if my luck holds good, it won't be long before I'm seated in the chimney-corner of The

Fortunes of War, and the wedding shall come off a week after that.' Tom only shook his head and said hope with him, as in Pandora's box, lay at the bottom. 'All right, mate; when you land 'twill be the first thing to come uppermost, for I've always found that in a chest things turn topsy-turvy.'

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## IX.

THE November of 185— was long remembered round Chad's End. Every mile of the coast was strewn with trophies of the cruel sea, for on the night of the 21st many brave ships, while battling with the storm, and vainly striving to weather the start, went down, and the *Nimrod* was among the number. Captain Johnstone did all in his power to save her and those on board, but the morning light only dawned upon two of her men, whom the crew of a dismantled barque (which had ridden the gale) were endeavouring to restore. One of them was quite exhausted, the other nearly so, but both revived—Tom to tell how he owed his life to Captain Johnstone, and the captain to thank Tom for

even a greater benefit. 'Never mind that, messmate,' the captain would say to Tom's acknowledgments; 'if I saved your body, you gave me hope in that hour that something might be saved which I was going fast to lose before God sent you aboard the *Nimrod*. I've lost every stick I'd got in the world; but, notwithstanding, I'm a happier man than I was when I set foot on shore with that in my pockets, which fetched me a welcome only so long as it lasted.'

They held a consultation as to what was best to be done, and then set off for Chad's End. Their comrades had lent them a little sum, which would procure them a lift part of the way. They must walk the rest and trust to chance.

It was quite dark and getting late when our two weather-stained pedestrians toiled on, footsore and weary, trying to reach the ferry before the last boat crossed. After that, four miles more trudging would bring them home. They were both very silent. The captain was hungry, tired, and sorely in need of a pipe, which he had no 'baccy to fill; while Tom's heart kept knocking with a dull thud which prevented any feeling but one of sickening anxiety. A lad pulled them across the ferry, and looked very sulky when they told him they hadn't any money. But they said they

knew Bill, the ferry-man, and would pay him next time they came that way.

Now they pass Swilly Farm, and the new fort that is being made; turn out of the road; and catch sight of the lights glimmering in the cottages and houses of Chad's End.

'Not that way through the village, but across this field and over the stile, and that'll bring us close by the house,' says Tom. But when they stand in front, and Tom sees the fastened door and closed shutters, his voice dies away, and he motions Johnstone to ask the girl standing at the next door where Mr Parker is? 'Mr Parker?—what, old Tom, do you mean?' The thud, thud of Tom's heart stops, and it seems an age before she answers. 'Oh, he's gone up to The Fortunes of War; I saw Polly Connor come to fetch him.'

Tom's head reels, and he is obliged to lean against the house, for hope springs up and makes his heart beat wildly. Thank God, the old man lives, and Polly is Polly Connor still.

## X.

IN the parlour of The Fortunes of War four people sat, each trying to keep up an appearance of gaiety, and not put any faith in the report which had been circulating in Chad's End all day, that the poor fellow washed ashore under Shovel Point was one of the men who sailed in the *Nimrod* with Captain Johnstone. The recent gales had been terrible; hour by hour came news of fresh disasters, and many a home in Chad's End was now a house of mourning. Still Mrs Connor said it indicated a want of faith to 'meet sorrow on the road.' The poor fellow might have left the *Nimrod* months ago; besides, nobody could say for certain that it was the same man.

The worthy dame pressed Aunt Betsey and old Tom to partake of the good fare she had provided; and to cheer them up, she told them long stories of people who had returned years after everybody had given them up for lost. At this Polly had to run away and sob in secret. She pictured to herself the weary years rolling on, and



Tom and she parted from each other, till they grew old and their love became dull; and then their meeting, perhaps, but not caring much for each other. Oh, rather let him come now, even although it should be to die, while life was love and love was life.

Old Tom talked to Mrs Connor; nodded smilingly to Aunt Betsey, whose wistful gaze never left his face; smoothed Polly's hair, as he rubbed her soft cheek against his horny hand in mute sympathy. He tried to seem hopeful and cheerful; but whatever he said or whatever he did, he never left off repeating to himself, 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.'

'You and Aunt Betsey might just as well stop here to-night,' said Mrs Connor; 'tis still raining, and there's no good in you two turning out in it, when Joe can run down and fasten all up. What do ye say?'

'Please do, Uncle Tom, it seems so comfortable to be all together,' pleaded Polly. So, after some hesitation and discussion with Aunt Betsey, the two were overruled, and Joe was despatched with the key to lock up the house and bring back the sundry articles Aunt Betsey needed. This was about nine o'clock; ten had struck, and there was no appearance

of Joe. 'Now ain't it tiresome of him to go and stay so!' exclaimed the widow; 'his supper will be dried up to a stick.' She had scarcely spoken when in rushed Joe, his face so red and excited that Mrs Connor looked at Aunt Betsey and put her hand to her mouth to signify that he had been drinking. Where were the things he had been told to fetch? Where was the key? 'Now, I declare it's enough to vex a saint!' exclaimed the widow; but Joe only jumped about like one possessed, calling out, 'Missis! Miss Polly! Maister Parker! it's all right, don't 'e be afeard now, they've sent me on for to warn 'e. He's a come back. Hooroar!'

'Ah, I should like to make 'e roar the other side of your mouth, you——' But a glance at Polly made her stop. A great fear seemed to have seized the girl. With whitened face, and clinging to old Tom, she stood for a moment gazing at the little window which separated the parlour from the bar. Then there seemed to be a great shout, and a cry of voices. The room was flooded with light, swam round, became quite dark again. Polly remembered nothing more until she found herself in Tom's arms, with her mother and old Tom bending over them with streaming eyes, while Joe was hugging

Aunt Betsey, and Captain Johnstone embracing Lydia. That night cannot be described—how Joe had found two sailors ransacking the house and the cupboards, eating and drinking everything they could lay hands upon. How Tom was recognized, and the plan arranged for making known his return; how Joe had been sent on in advance—the missis concluding that he was ‘half-seas over;’ nor how, when all was quiet, they knelt, hand-in-hand, and with thankful hearts praised God ‘because they were at rest, and He had brought them to the haven where they would be.’

Captain Johnstone, to use his own words, ‘didn’t know, for the next week, whether he was on his head or his heels; or whether he was himself at all!’ He was completely lionized; everybody wanted to make much of the man who had saved the life of young Tom Parker. The Rector publicly thanked him, the Squire shook hands with him, the Methodist minister mentioned him in his sermon. He was required to take two dinners, drink two teas, and eat two suppers every day—one at The Fortunes of War, the other at old Tom’s. As for talking about going to sea for months to come, he was told that ‘he’d better hold his tongue, unless he wanted the house about his ears.’ The

captain described himself as quite flabbergasted. 'He hadn't done nothing in particular that he knew by, except getting the lad on his bit of a raft, and holding him taut when there.' He declared in after years, that the first time he ever blushed in his life was that evening on which Tom told the yarn, and when Polly suddenly jumped up and gave him a taste of her pretty lips. But his great reverence was for Mrs Connor. 'Ah, missis,' he would say, 'if there's a bit of good in me, it lies at your door. You were the first who ever saw anything but bad in me; and made me feel a desire to be what you thought I was.' At which the widow would laugh, and tell him she wasn't the only one who saw the good side. Upon this the captain would look very sheepish, for lately Patience Brewer had been almost living at The Fortunes of War, making Polly's wedding things; and it had been observed that the captain every night offered to take her home. On Sunday afternoon, indeed, he went to see her father. He had tea at the cottage, and Mrs Connor told Aunt Betsey that she shouldn't be surprised if something came of it, 'for weddings never come single.'

Dawson and Glegg have offered to take Tom back again; but there is no

need for this now, as Mrs Connor has been only waiting for her daughter's marriage to resign The Fortunes of War to her and her husband. Then old Tom has a nice bit of money in the bank ; so that between the two the young people will not begin life badly.

Tom and Polly are very much sobered. There are no jealousies now, no quarrellings,—only full trust and faith ; as they stand together, leaning on the old gate at Withy Pool, and recount the misery they caused each other, the torture they both endured, they vow that 'perfect love' which 'casteth out fear.'



## 'A FEATHER IN JACK'S CAP.'

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### I.

**U**NSTABLE as water, thou shalt not excel.' Now, why need the Rev. Felix Littleton have chosen that particular text on this particular Sunday in May? And why need the congregation of the little village church of Bulhatch-Tye have turned round to openly stare or furtively glance at Jack Graysfield? Poor Jack! he did not quite know where to look. Farmer Graysfield's seat, which was in the chancel, could be seen from any part of the church; and right opposite sat the Rector's servants, instead of the wife and sons and daughters, who would no doubt have filled the pew had he not had a disappointment early in life. Jack felt his honest-looking face

growing scarlet; and his feelings were not at all improved by hearing his mother give an audible sigh, and his father a suppressed chuckle, as though he said, 'Now for it, my lad.'

Well, Jack felt that if he looked down, everybody would think he was ashamed of what he had done; and, though he was as sorry as could be that he had pained his mother and angered his father, he wasn't going to hang his head before everybody. So he set his mouth firm, sat bolt upright, and stared round the little church in rather a defiant manner, until, at length, his eyes fell upon a pew very near the door. In it there was a weather-beaten old man, with white hair and a scar over his eye, which made him look very fierce; and by his side sat the prettiest dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked little maiden in the world, as Jack thought. In a moment, the young fellow's whole expression changed. All indignation vanished directly his eyes met the soft glance of Katie Leng, who looked all the more winning, because Jack saw, or thought he saw, an effort to keep down the tears which would come into her eyes at the thought of his going to sea.

Yes, that going to sea was the cause of all the disturbance. Jack Graysfield had made up his mind, and nothing would



turn him from it. He would be a sailor. Now, if it had been one of the Copford boys, or the Pages, it wouldn't have mattered. The village would have permitted their departure without any other visible sign of regret than that arising from the certainty that they would return again to fulfil the old proverb, 'He that is born to be hanged can never be drowned.' But that the only son of the richest farmer in Bullhatch-Tye, or for miles round, who would soon have a basket-fortune in the continually dropping legacies of maiden aunts and bachelor cousins, should go roaming in foreign lands, and be shipwrecked, and may-be drowned, was not to be permitted. Old Ned Leng ought to be ashamed of himself for filling the boy's head with such rubbish.

The contention had first begun two years ago, when Jack was sixteen. At that time he had begged his father to let him go one voyage, and then, if he didn't like it, he could return and settle down to farming. But Mr Graysfield would not listen to this; he flew into a violent rage, and declared that he would horsewhip Jack, never speak to him again, and cut him off with a shilling. All this seeming to have no more effect than idle threats generally have, he tried a more powerful

argument. Jack's going to sea, he urged, would kill his mother, and he would never see either father or mother again, for the old man would soon follow his wife when he had nothing to live for. Mr Graysfield went on in this way until the lad at last consented to try and overcome his passion for a sailor's life, and said that he would not even speak of it for two years; but that if, at the end of that time, the wish was still strong upon him, his father must let him go, lest he should do no good at home, and perhaps bring disgrace upon a name which for generations had been held in honour by the whole county.

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## II.

AND now the two years had passed. The time had dragged slowly with Jack, although it had flown so swiftly with Mr and Mrs Graysfield, that they were completely staggered when, a week ago, Jack had somewhat abruptly informed them that, come what might, he could not stay and spend all his life in Bulhatch-Tye. His heart, he owned, ached sorely at leaving them, but he hoped they would let him try the sea, and not think too much of

what might seem his want of love for them.

Of course, Mrs Graysfield's tears began to flow, and the farmer was in a worse rage than ever. He used such threats, and said such sneering and bitter things to his son, that though Jack remained silent, as he had determined, Mrs Graysfield could not do so; but, woman-like, dried her tears, and entered upon such a defence of her boy's character and spirit, that the farmer was completely discomfited, and was at last obliged sulkily to say that Jack might go if he liked, but, as his consent wasn't needed, he shouldn't trouble himself any further; and though he'd no wish to speak in the spirit of prophecy, Jack would rue the day he left Matching Farm, and his mother might wish she hadn't been quite so ready with her tongue.

Although matters were thus far settled, Mrs Graysfield was not minded to give in. She was still determined to leave no stone unturned to induce Jack to give up his idea. She went to all their friends and relations, and begged them to write him persuasive letters. Jack was overpowered by heart-rending epistles from aunts and cousins and sincere 'well-wishers.' But what were all these missives in comparison with the letter he received one morning from Cousin Watson, at Bristol, saying

that a friend of his would be very glad to give him a berth aboard his ship, which was to sail almost directly for the Mauritius? When Mrs Graysfield saw this letter, all hope seemed extinguished. She now began to turn her animosity (born solely of the grief she felt at losing her son) against those who were reported to be the originators and main cause of his taking this mad fancy. She had never yet given Jack her opinion of old Ned Leng and his daughter; but if the last arrow left missed its aim, then she would spare them no longer. Thus resolved, she went to the Rector (than whom an easier, kinder-hearted man never dozed away his existence in a remote country parish), and begged him with much earnestness, and as a special favour to herself and her husband, to preach such a sermon next Sunday afternoon as would go home to her boy's heart, and would not spare those she looked upon as being the cause of all her troubles.

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### III.

MR LITTLETON was not a little perplexed as to what he ought to do, and still

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more so as to what he could possibly say in the event of his consenting. He had never said 'No' to anybody in his life—the word being very familiar to his ears, but a complete stranger to his tongue. How could he refuse Mrs Graysfield, she was such a good creature? She made the best 'ginger tickle' in the county, and was always sending him cream cheeses and game pies.

'Well, well, Mrs Graysfield,' he said, wistfully, 'I'll see what can be done.'

'Oh, thank you, sir; I shall take care that all my family are present;' and then she rose to take her departure.

'I don't promise much,' said Mr Littleton, 'but I'll do my best, Mrs Graysfield; I'll do my best.'

'Then, sir, I'm sure, unless his heart's turned to adamant stone, he'll be touched by your feeling words.'

At this the good woman bowed herself out, and left the poor Rector to fidget and worry as to what he should say, until it was quite late on Saturday afternoon. He had scarcely sat down earnestly to work, when he was interrupted by a friend; and on this friend proposing to stay to dinner, the Rector could not summon up courage to say that he was engaged. The consequence was that ten o'clock found him very tired and sleepy, trying to lash

himself into a rage with young Jack Graysfield, and all who had anything to do with his having to write this philippic.

Everybody said afterwards, that Mr Littleton quite surpassed himself, and that even had it been a funeral sermon, the discourse could not have been more impressive. They could easily see that; for notwithstanding Jack and the Lengs holding their heads so high, they were completely taken aback by the Rector. But the preacher knowing nothing of all this praise, walked home in a very dissatisfied frame of mind, his tender conscience upbraiding him for having been over-severe with persons whom he did not know. Perhaps he had caused pain to them, and to his favourite Jack Graysfield. Both parson and people were very far out in their calculations and surmises. Beyond the text, and an occasional sentence, at which Jack 'pulled himself together,' as old Leng would have said, denunciations, rebukes, and appeals were completely lost upon him. And I doubt very much whether Jack's reflections did not prove far more conducive to his spiritual welfare than a grave attention to every word of that memorable discourse.

His mind and fancy were busy enough all the time the Rector was speaking. He

was only eighteen, and he was going out into the world, which to him hitherto had been Bulhatch-Tye—going to leave all his friends and dear associations. Why, everybody in the village knew him, and all about him; and there wasn't a single man, woman, or child in the church that afternoon but he could tell their names and histories. Oh! how often he should think of them as sitting in church,—the doors wide open, affording a glimpse of the splendid avenue of elms, each tree of which seemed bending down to try and listen to the parson's voice! And then the coming out and the shaking hands with everybody, and the accustomed walks as far as the mill with Mr Leng and Katie. Would Katie be true to him? He could not help questioning himself. He was too young to speak to his father, but there was something in his heart that rose up and cast all doubt away. Before he had time to think any more the congregation were standing up, the Rector had pronounced the blessing, and Jack's head was bowed down as he sent up perhaps the most earnest prayer he had ever uttered, that God would bless and take care of Katie, and his father and mother, and Mr Littleton, and everybody whom he loved, that they might all meet again.

## IV.

BULHATCH Mill stood at the top of Friar's Lane, and half way down it was the cottage in which old Ned Leng and his daughter Katie lived. Bulhatch-Tye was Ned Leng's native village, which in youth he had seemingly loved so little, that he had run away from it to go to sea. But when he was nearly fifty, he suddenly reappeared one day, saying that his prayer for many a year had been that he might lay his bones in Bulhatch churchyard. He appeared to think that time ought to have stood still in his rustic home while he was away; and he listened with a blank face as he was told that many of his old playmates had already taken possession of their 'narrow cell,' whilst others had left the place, and some had forgotten him altogether. Still Jane Walters was alive, and to her he could show the lock of hair which her sister Kate (now dead and gone) had given to him at parting. As she was a widow in delicate health, and not able to get the comforts she needed, Ned asked her, for her sister's sake, to marry him. She consented, and

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for twelve months she seemed stronger, but after little Katie's birth, she slowly faded away. The old sailor was thus left with his baby charge, which he seemed to regard as a gift from God, who had answered his prayer in His own way; for now there was a Katie Leng after all.

Ned soon became very popular in the village, especially with the youngsters, and with Jack Graysfield above all. He carved out models of boats for him, and rigged a cutter that would sail well, no matter how the wind blew. He taught the lad to sing sea songs; and in the long winter evenings he would amuse the youngsters by telling stories, as he sat in his big chair puffing his pipe, Katie on her little stool between his knees, and Jack opposite, drinking in every word he said. Best of all was it, when, with the whole enthusiasm of his nature, he recited how he had served on board the *Victory*, had borne part in the battle of Trafalgar, dilating with utmost vividness on the minutest details, until, sinking his voice, and reverently lifting from his head the old cap he always wore, he told how he saw the great conqueror fall, 'the like of whom no mortal eye would ever see again.'

Mrs Graysfield often asked Mr Leng and Katie to Matching Farm. She felt

grateful to them for amusing and interesting her son as they did, little dreaming that the boy was imbibing a taste for adventure, and developing a desire to go and see foreign climes. Long before Farmer Graysfield or his wife knew aught of the mischief growing in their son's head, Jack had made up his mind on two points. He would go to sea, and he would marry Katie Leng. Now, if anything could have been more opposed to his parents' wishes than going to sea, it was that he should marry Katie. True, she might be the prettiest girl in the county, but that was not to the point. The Graysfields had always married cousins, and there was a cousin growing up for Jack now. And with this cousin there was land adjoining Matching, and money enough to set them up at once if they pleased. No sooner, then, did all this burst upon Mrs Graysfield, than, as she said, she saw through the whole thing. The wicked old man and his artful girl had laid a cunning trap for her unsuspecting boy. But she would beat them, if anybody could. The first effort at opposition had failed, it is true; for, notwithstanding the sermon, Jack was not to be turned from his purpose; but they would not forget to revenge themselves on the Lengs. During the next six months, accordingly, poor

Katie had to put up with many a bitter slight and petty jealousy. The whole society of Bulhatch-Tye were either aunts, or sisters, or cousins to the Graysfields, in degree near or farther removed, and were up in arms against these leaders of children from the path of filial duty.

As nothing could be said against a girl whose sole care seemed to be to make her old father happy, these annoyances had to be confined to excluding her from summer parties, and taking little notice of her at such gatherings as the Rector's harvest feast.

'Never mind, my girl,' the old man would say when Katie had been wounded by some spiteful dart; 'somebody will come home from sea who'll put it all straight.'

'Oh, I don't know, father. Sometimes I think, now everybody's turned so against me, whether Jack will be the same.'

'Jack change! not he. What does the words of his favourite song say?' And at this point the voice, which now began to quaver a little, would give out—

“Change as ye list, ye winds, my heart shall be  
The faithful compass that still points to thee.”

Take ye no notice, and it'll all blow over, Katie. It's only women's ways, my dear; they don't *mean* nothing.'

## V.

PERHAPS it would have all blown over, had not a circumstance just then occurred which seemed far enough from being likely to affect the Lengs in any way. This was, the return of Mrs Knighton and her son to Friarswell Park. Mrs Knighton was the grand lady of the place, and her son (who was all but come of age) was the owner of Friarswell. Mrs Knighton had been left a widow when Reginald was about three years old. Stricken with grief at the loss of her husband, she withdrew from all society, and shut herself up at Friarswell, announcing her intention to devote herself entirely to her son. She would hardly let the boy out of her sight; she would not send him to school; by all kinds of indulgence she fostered his shyness, until, at eighteen, the poor lad was as timid and sensitive as a girl, and wholly unfitted to fill the position to which he was born.

Mrs Knighton had suddenly opened her eyes to this fact, and, hoping to overcome in one year the work of the eighteen

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preceding ones, she had taken Reginald abroad, in company with an invalid bachelor friend and an elderly maiden sister, and was much surprised as well as annoyed to find that he returned to Friarswell very much the same as he left it.

Very soon, however, a change became noticeable in him. After going three Sundays to church, both morning and afternoon, he conceived a violent fancy for rambling about the place alone, particularly in the fields behind Friar's Lane. Mrs Knighton, I believe, might have speculated on the cause of this new whim for a whole year without coming near the truth. Poor Reginald had fallen desperately in love with that 'dreadfully artful Katie Leng.'

Of course, he had no difficulty in seeing her. He had been accustomed to talk to old Ned all his life; and as for Katie, she was quite innocent of any suspicion that she was the attraction which drew the young master so frequently to the cottage, and made him stay so long. She certainly wished that he would not join her when she chanced to meet him in the village, for he had nothing to say except how glad he was to get home again, and that he should be of age next month, and then he could do whatever he pleased.

But though Katie was blind, her neighbours were not. The mail that carried to Jack one of her loving letters, with three tiny kisses dropped in wax outside, also bore two or three family epistles, full of varied details as to the sad way in which Katie Leng was going on. They'd always thought her flighty, but had held their tongues. But now she'd forced people to speak by her boldness in walking every evening with the young squire, who was never out of the cottage.

Jack looked rather glum as he read that part of his mother's note where she hoped he would 'never take any more notice of such a wicked, pert girl, or think of her.' He tore up the other virtuously indignant epistles, and then re-read his love-letter, afterwards kissing it a dozen times, and wishing he was only home to show them that all the squires in the world couldn't shake his faith in Katie.

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## VI.

Now, all this could not go on very long without some echo of it reaching Mrs Knighton's ears. When she heard that

her Reginald was always walking about with old Leng's daughter, she could not believe it. She scorned the very idea; her Reginald, her 'sensitive, proud boy,' make a companion of an old sailor and his uneducated daughter! Impossible! But when, day after day, with strained eyes she watched him go away in the one direction,—when her heart ached to see him return one evening in such hopeless dejection that she could not get a word from him, she could bear it no longer. So when he came to say 'Good night,' she told him all she had heard, and asked him what he had to say. He stood for a moment irresolute, and then blurted out:

'I love her with all my heart, and if she won't marry me, I shall die, mother!'

Was she in her senses? A Knighton marry a vulgar village girl!

'Reginald,' she exclaimed, 'do you dare insult me, by saying that a son of mine would ever ask a low-born woman to be his wife, and take my place as mistress of Friarswell?'

'Katie Leng is no low-born woman,' he answered defiantly, 'and I have asked her to be my wife; and she,—she says she will not have me; but I will marry her yet.'

Before his mother could find words to

speaking her wrath, he had left her alone to pace the room, in bitter self-reproach that she had not listened to those who had begged her to let her boy be brought up as others were, so that he might be fitted for the position he was to fill.

Wearily passed the night; and early the next day Mrs Knighton knocked at the door of the cottage in Friar's Lane. She found Katie alone, and at once began in a hard, cold voice, to tell her tale of the village gossip,—how she had not believed anything against a girl whom she always thought well of; 'but,' she added, 'I can shut my ears no longer, and before I speak again to my son, I wish to know if you can defend your reputation in any way.'

Before that word was spoken Katie had been thinking how she could best screen the young squire's foolishness; but now, Mrs Knighton herself could not have walked more proudly than did Katie Leng to her little old-fashioned work-box. Taking from it two letters, she put them before the lady without saying a word. One (which had been received that morning) was a passionate appeal from Reginald, begging her to re-consider what she had said, and promising to marry her the very day after he came of age, adding that he would declare it at once, or



keep it secret, as she pleased, since he cared for nothing in the world but her love. The other (which was all ready to send off) was Katie's answer—a letter any girl might have been proud of, though poor Katie blushed scarlet as Mrs Knighton, with a face blanched by the pain caused by reading her son's letter, opened it. Neither she nor Katie noticed the anxious face of old Ned, who, after wonderingly watching them from behind the elder bush outside the window, moved into the porch, and softly lifted the latch, to listen to the interview.

As Mrs Knighton read Katie's letter, she was visibly affected. The delicate way in which the girl tried to spare the young man all pain; the manner in which she drew his attention to the difference in their positions, and the duty he owed to his station in life; her reference to the grief it would cause his mother, who loved him so dearly; and, finally, her frank confession of the impossibility of her thinking of him, as she loved some one else, who alone should ever call her wife—struck Mrs Knighton with astonished admiration. She folded up the letter, and stepping over to where Katie sat, put her hands on the girl's shoulders, as she said:

'Katie Leng, forgive me!'



and, in apology, muttered something about 'letting the cat out of the bag.'

'Come, Katie,' said Mrs Knighton, 'let me share your secret; for, believe me, from this day until my life ends, you will never have a truer friend than me. Is Jack the husband you have chosen, my dear?'

'Oh, ma'am! I don't know about husband,' stammered out the girl; 'but we've promised to be true to each other, and Jack told his mother so, though he didn't ask Mr Graysfield, because we are so young.'

'They must be very proud of their son's choice,' said Mrs Knighton.

'Indeed, they are not,' replied Katie, 'for ever since Jack has been gone, neither Mr nor Mrs Graysfield, nor any of their relations, have looked my way. They say father was the cause of his going against them all, and taking to the sea.'

'Was that true, Leng?' asked Mrs Knighton, turning round and smiling.

'Well, ma'am,' replied old Ned, 'I never said a word to their boy I wouldn't have said to a boy of my own; although it did seem a thousand pities for a fine young fellow like Jack to lose the chance of ever getting a pop at the Frenchmen. He's in a merchant vessel now, but

Katie won't rest, and I shan't die happy, till he wears the king's button.'

Mrs. Knighton turned to Katie again and said—

'Katie, would it be a pleasure—could I serve you in any way, if I interested myself for Jack Graysfield? Many of my family have interest in the navy, and I might be able to do something. It shall not be for want of trying, if it would render any service to you.'

'Oh, you're too kind! indeed, indeed I have done nothing that should make you trouble yourself like that.'

'Say no more,' answered Mrs Knighton, 'only remember every time you ask anything of me you confer a favour. Now good-bye, Katie. Do not judge my conduct harshly; remember Reginald is all the hope I have in this world; he is my only son, and I am a widow.'

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## VII.

DURING the next twelve months there were wonders worked in Bulhatch-Tye. To begin: the young squire went abroad again, but this time with his cousin Colonel

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Lumsden. Mrs Knighton remained at Friarswell, calling upon all her neighbours, and renewing her old intimacies, so that her house might be the resort of cheerful society by the time her son returned. Then Katie Leng became Mrs Knighton's prime favourite, so that nobody who looked down upon her could expect to be shown any favour by the lady of the manor. Again, Jack Graysfield was now a 'master's assistant,' a real officer in his Majesty's navy, and was coming home next year with a cocked hat and real sword by his side to marry Katie Leng; and last and best of all, at Friarswell new year's treat, when the gentry and all the parish were present, Mrs Knighton had desired old Leng to propose the health of Jack Graysfield, after her health and her son's had been given. This toast was drunk with much applause, and Farmer Graysfield, in returning thanks for his son, took the opportunity of publicly expressing his gratitude to Mrs Knighton for using her interest in his behalf, and so turning what his parents had looked upon as a disgrace, into an honour and a pride. At this point Mrs Knighton stood up, and said before everybody, that although the respect she bore to Mr and Mrs Graysfield would have led her to serve their son with pleasure,

yet that it was not to her they were indebted so much as to another person present. 'This is the one you must thank,' she added, turning and taking the bewildered Katie by the hand. 'Katie Leng, by her true and honourable conduct, laid me under a lifelong obligation, and the only way she let me show my gratitude was by promoting the interest of the man who is happy enough to have chosen her to be his wife. Take your daughter to your heart, Mrs Graysfield; and when my son brings one home to me, may I have as much reason to be proud of her as you have!'

Mrs Graysfield didn't wait for more invitation. She had a good motherly heart, and, until this animosity had arisen, had always liked Katie. So Katie sat between the farmer and his wife for the rest of the evening; and because she would have her own dear old father near her, Ned sat next to Mrs Graysfield, chuckling, 'Won't this be a feather in Jack's cap!' Then Mr Littleton came over, and shook hands with them all, saying—

'Now, about that sermon, which has always rather weighed on my mind: I rather think, Mrs Graysfield, when Jack returns, I must make it up by preaching another in his favour.'

'Hooroar!' cried old Ned, excitedly. 'Why, that'll be another feather in Jack's cap!'

And the Rev. Felix Littleton was as good as his word; for on the first Sunday after Jack's return, the congregation turned their eyes even more curiously than they had done on a former occasion, first on the Graysfields' pew, and then on Ned Leng's, when the text was read out:—'A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.'





